

# TEEVADHARA

A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION

MAN THE TRAGIC HERO—  
SOME ASPECTS OF BIBLICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

THE DOUBLE OF THE GODS TURNED BLASPHEMER:  
MAN IN THE TRADITIONS OF MESOPOTAMIA

*K. Luke*

MAN IN GENESIS CHAPTERS 1–11

*Biswas Joe*

MAN IN THE PREACHING OF JESUS

*Thomas Jacob*

THE TRAGEDY OF MAN ACCORDING TO ST PAUL

*L. Legrand*

THE TRAGEDY OF FREEDOM: MAN IN THE THOUGHT  
OF ZARATHUSHTRA

*K. Luke*

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# **The Word of God**

**MAN THE TRAGIC HERO—  
SOME ASPECTS OF BIBLICAL ANTHROPOLOGY**

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# Editorial

Modern thinkers have often accentuated the tragic element in man's situation in the world, and, from their point of view, man is the tragic hero *kat' exochēn*. This picture is to some extent consonant with what the Scriptures have to say: though created in the image and after the likeness of God, man has, through the misuse of freedom, made himself the object of God's wrath. It is the purpose of the current issue of *Jeevadhara* to bring to the fore this specific aspect of our human situation, and the way out as indicated by the Bible. The anthropology of the Bible is unique in several respects, but to highlight the element of uniqueness it is necessary to view the Judaeo-Christian tradition against its general oriental background, and the first article is meant to furnish the reader with this perspective. The second contribution deals with the traditions of Israel. Because of the vastness of the subject, it had to be selective in its discussions: that is the reason why the reader will find the writer dwelling almost exclusively on the initial chapters of the Book of Genesis. The subject of the third article is the idea of man in the preaching of our Lord: man is, above all, the prodigal child who has gone away from his father's home and whom the loving father is calling to a radical decision. As every Christian knows, St Paul has not only graphically described the tragic situation of man but has also shown how God's grace that comes to man through Christ's death and resurrection is able to save him from this predicament: this facet of biblical theology is the subject of the fourth study. There is no Indological contribution in this number, for the idea of man in the traditions of India has been the object of two studies in *Jeevadhara* 23. However, an attempt is made in the final essay to bring to the notice of the reader an interesting line of thought that did actually evolve in a section of the Aryan community.

All of us, at some time or other, have had experience of our tragic situation, and we may have exclaimed with St Paul: "Who will deliver me...?" The answer (according to a variant reading preserved by some manuscripts and versions) is: "The grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 7: 24f). The present number of *Jeevadhara* endeavours to put before the reader this consoling message of the Scriptures.

# The Double of the Gods Turned Blasphemer: Man in the Traditions of Mesopotamia

Mesopotamia, the vast stretch of lands that roughly correspond to modern Iraq, was one of the cradles of civilization in the ancient world. The Mesopotamians had long been on the scene of history when, towards the close of the thirteenth century B.C., Israel emerged as a nation with its own specific identity and unique faith. They were the creators of the art of writing<sup>1</sup>, and the literary documents they have left behind portray for us, doubtless in a haphazard fashion, a definite anthropology, an acquaintance with which is a 'must' for a serious student of the Bible, for then only will he be able to view the OT picture of men against its general oriental background<sup>2</sup>.

## I

The Mesopotamians were convinced that man was a creation of the gods. The Sumerian sources, for example, embody several accounts of it.<sup>3</sup> Thus, according to one of them, the gods, on

1. For a succinct introduction, cf. Luke, "Sumerian Religious Lyric", *The Living Word* (1975).

2. We leave out of consideration the traditions of Egypt lest the study become too long; the curious reader may be referred to S. Morenz, *Agyptische Religion* (Die Religionen der Menschheit 8, 2nd ed., Stuttgart, 1974).

3. Discussions in T. Jacobsen, "Sumerian Mythology: A Review Article", *Toward the Image of Tammuz and other Essays on Mesopotamian History and Culture* (Harvard Semitic Series 21, Harvard, 1970) pp. 104-31. S. N. Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology* (New York, 1961); "Mythology of Sumer and Akkad," *Mythologies of the Ancient World* (Doubleday Anchor Books, New York, 1961) pp. 93-137. Comparative study of Sumero-Accadian and biblical texts in G. Castellino, "Les origines de la civilisation selon les textes bibliques et les textes cunéiformes," *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum* 4 (1957) pp. 116-37. Kramer, "Sumerian

finding it difficult to procure their bread, began complaining, but since Enki, the god of wisdom, who could have helped them, kept on slumbering, the plea of the famished ones went unheeded. At this juncture his mother intervened and brought before him their tears, saying:

"O my son, rise from your bed....

Fashion servants of the gods, may they produce their

doubles (?)"<sup>4</sup>

After serious deliberation Enki told his mother:

"O my mother, the creature whose name you

uttered,<sup>5</sup> it exists,

Bind upon it the image (?) of the gods;

Mix the heart of the clay that is over the abyss....

You, do you bring the limbs into existence....

The goddesss (of birth)... will stand by at your

fashioning;

O my mother, decree its (the newborn's) fate....

It is man...."<sup>6</sup>

Literature and the Bible," *Studia Biblica et Orientalia III. Oriens Antiquus* (Analecta Orientalia 12, Rome, 1959) pp. 185-204. R. Labat, "Les origines et la formation de la terre dans le poem babylonien de la creation," *ibid.* pp. 205-15. V. Maag, "Sumerische und babylonische Mythen von der Erschaffung des Menschen," *Asiatische Studien* 8 (1954) pp. 85-106; "Anthropogonie in ihrem Verhältniszur altorientalischen Mythologie," *ibid.* 9 (1955) pp. 15-44.<sup>4</sup>

4. The interrogation mark means that the rendering is not altogether certain.

5. According to ancient oriental conceptions to have a name (= Sumerian MU: Accadian *sumu*) means to exist, and the poet's reference to the uttering of the name at the moment of creation is to be understood in the light of the Mesopotamian belief in the infallible efficacy of the spoken word (cf. Luke, "Word" in the Traditions of Mesopotamia and Egypt," *Jeevadharma* 2 (1971), pp. 165-75). In this paper Sumerian words are printed in capital letters and Accadian ones in italics.

6. Jacobsen, *op. cit.*, pp. 120f. (cf. too pp. 116f.). Kramer, *Mythologies*. pp. 103f.

According to another creation myth the god Enlil

“... did verily speed to remove heaven from earth  
So that the seed (from which grew) the nation could sprout  
(up) from the field....  
So that the ‘flesh producer’ could grow the vanguard  
mankind.”<sup>7</sup>

The “flesh producer”<sup>8</sup> is a sacred spot in the city of Nippur<sup>9</sup> frequently mentioned in the texts, where, it was believed, man sprouted up in primordial times like a plant from the earth<sup>10</sup>. The author of the myth under consideration goes on to narrate how Enlil.

“... drove his pickax into the flesh producer.”  
In the hole (which he thus made) was the vanguard of  
mankind  
(And) while (the people of) his land were breaking  
through the ground,  
He eyed his black-headed ones<sup>11</sup> in steadfast fashion.”<sup>12</sup>

Enlil, then, observes how good his work is!

Let us now pass on to the traditions of the Accadians which also have preserved for us a number of creation stories. Accord-

7. Jacobsen, *op. cit.*, pp. 113f.

8. In Sumerian UZU. MU. A (UZU = *siru* = flesh MU (also MUD) = to appear, be created, grow up. A is the sign of the genitive case).

9. Known in Sumerian by the name DUR. AN. KI, “Bond (DUR) of Heaven (AN) and Earth” (KI).

10. According to another Sumerian myth,

“When destinies had been determined for (all) engendered things.

The people had broken through the ground like grass.”

The last phrase literally means “like plants and herbs” (Jacobsen, *op. cit.*, p. 112).

11. In Sumerian UKU. MES. SAG. GI. GA (= Accadian *nisē salmat qaqqadi*) “black-heads,” was the designation of mankind (UKU = people (sg.), MES, sign of the plural. SAG = head; GI = black; GA, sign of the genitive. Accadian *nisē* = people (pl.); *salmat* = black; *qaqqadi*, genitive of *qaqqadum* = head).

12. Jacobsen, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

ing to the epic of Gilgamesh (I:ii:34)<sup>13</sup> Enkidu, the first savage, was created from the clay of the earth:

“Aruru washed her hands,  
Pinched off clay and cast it on the steppe<sup>14</sup>,  
On the steppe she created valiant Enkidu,  
Offspring of... (the) essence of Ninurta.”<sup>15</sup>

The most remarkable account of the origin of man is no doubt the one supplied by *Enuma Elish*, the Babylonian epic of creation.<sup>16</sup> Marduk, the god of Babylon, gets an idea: “to fashion artful works”; and he makes known his plan to the gods (VI: 5-8):

“Blood I will mass and cause bones to be.  
I will establish a savage, man shall be his name.  
Verily savage man I will create,  
He shall be charged with the service of the gods  
That they might be at ease.”<sup>17</sup>

The following passage will give us an idea of the Accadian picture of the first man in his state of savagery:

“Shaggy with hair is his whole body,  
He is endowed with head hair like a woman.  
The locks of hair sprout like Nisaba (the goddess  
of grain)...”

13. Translation in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (abbr. *ANET*. 2nd ed., Princeton, 1956) pp. 72-99. Cf. too A. Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels* (Phoenix Books, 9th ed., Chicago, 1973). W. von Soden, “Beiträge zum Verständnis des babylonischen Gilgames-Epos,” *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 53 (1959) pp. 209-35.

14. The statement can mean that the pinch of clay was cast on the spot where Enkidu was to be born; the original is also susceptible of the renderings “drew a design upon it” or “spat upon” (*ANET*, p. 73. n. 13).

15. *ANET*, p. 74)

16. Translation in *ANET*, pp. 60-72. Cf. too Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis* (Phoenix Books, 6th ed., Chicago, 1969).

17. *ANET*, p. 68. The Accadian nouns corresponding to “savage” and “man” are *lullu* and *amēlu* respectively. For a discussion, cf. Luke, *Studies on the Book of Genesis* (Quilon, 1974), p. 208, n. 41.

Garbed is he like Sumuqan (the god of cattle).  
 With the gazelles he feeds on grass,  
 With the wild beasts he jostles at the watering-place,  
 With the teeming creatures his heart delights in water.”<sup>18</sup>

This savage is nonetheless the double<sup>19</sup> of the gods; compare,  
 “Thou, Aruru, didst create (man)  
 Create now his double...  
 When Aruru heard this,  
 A double of Anu she conceived within her.”<sup>20</sup>

According to another myth the god Ea

“...in his wise heart conceived an image,  
 And created Asushunamir, a eunuch.”<sup>21</sup>

Enuma Elish (VI:10–16) goes to the extent of affirming that man is fashioned from the very blood of a god who had turned rebel and was therefore condemned to death:

“They bound him...”<sup>22</sup>  
 They imposed on him his guilt and severed his blood  
 (vessels),  
 Out of which they fashioned mankind.  
 He (the god Ea) imposed the service and let free the gods.  
 After Ea, the wise, had created mankind,  
 He imposed upon it the service of the gods.”<sup>23</sup>

18. *ANET*, p. 74.

19. In Accadian *zikru*, “name, mention, speech” (from the verbal *zakāru*, “to speak, name, call”); the passage we are citing has the same noun which has too the derivative meanings “evection, image, double, duplicate, replica.” The Hebrew Bible uses the noun *šelem*. “image” (Gen. 1: 26f. etc.) which corresponds to Accadian *šalmu*, “statue, figurine” (Sumerian NU and also ALAM); the latter does not have anything in common with the sense “image” has in Gen. 1.

20. *ANET*, p. 74.

21. *ANET*, p. 108.

22. That is, the god Kingu.

23. *ANET*, p. 68.

There is, in short, something very special in man. The reason for this, according to the Mesopotamians, was his likeness to the gods, or what is more, his sharing in their very nature.

Religion, understood as the service of the gods, was a basic constituent of life in ancient Mesopotamia, but it was visualized above all as man's integration into the process of nature.<sup>24</sup> The naturalistic and polytheistic religions of antiquity, which, unlike the religion of Israel, had no sense of history and also not the slightest idea of the final consummation of the historical process, were concerned with the preservation of the *status quo* with its ever-recurring phenomena of birth, growth, death and rebirth. This preoccupation took concrete form and shape in the great New Year Festival, generally known by the Sumerian name of Akitu.<sup>25</sup> It was celebrated with great pomp and pageantry at the beginning of every year in Mesopotamia from time immemorial. During the solemnities the creation epic was recited, and through various spectacular rites<sup>26</sup> the godhead's

24. This specific aspect of the religions of Mesopotamia and Egypt is well brought out by H. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods. A Study of Ancient Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature* (6th ed., Chicago, 1969).

25. The etymology of this term is not clear, though in actual use it meant the feast as well the temple where it was celebrated. Original text of the ritual of the feast in transcription with translation in F. Thureau-Dangin, *Rituels accadiens* (Paris, 1921) pp. 127-54. Cf. too *The Chicago Assyrian Dictionary I/1* (Chicago, 1964) pp. 267-72. A. Falkenstein, "akiti-Festhaus," *Festschrift johannes Friedrich* (Heidelberg, 1965) pp. 147-82. Frankfort, *op. cit.*, pp. 313-33. Labat, *Le caractère religieux de la royauté assyro-babylonienne* (Etudes assyriologiques d'Assyriologie 2, Paris, 1939) pp. 166-76. R. Largement, *Dictionnaire de la Bible Supplement VJ*, cols. 556-97. S. A. Pallis, *The Babylonian Akītu Festival* (Copenhagen, 1926) pp. 11-49.

26. E.g., the recitation of Enuma Elish, the poem recounting Marduk's victory over the forces of chaos, the ritual humiliation of the king (divesting him of the royal insignia, striking him on the cheek, dragging him by the ear into the presence of Marduk, etc.) and his restoration, the New Year procession, the *hieros gamos* (sacred marriage) between god (king) and the goddess (priestess), etc.

victory over the forces of chaos, which are incessantly threatening the established order of cosmos, was actualized and the people at large believed that through these rites they became sharers in the divine victory; this meant that they were safe and secure.

## II

Theoretical convictions regarding man's ability to integrate himself into the process of nature and thus preserve the *status quo* were often dealt a deadly blow by the experiences of daily life, and this not only shattered the optimism of the Mesopotamians but engendered in them an extreme form of despair and pessimism, so much so that men even became blasphemers. There was, to begin with, the economic factor, i. e., the exploitation of the poor by those who were better off. Although some rulers endeavoured to alleviate the plight of the poor man<sup>27</sup> injustice continued unabated. There were, further, numerous political upheavals and catastrophes with the consequent collapse of the whole socio-economic structure. Even when there were powerful rulers in the land, political intrigues remained a common occurrence. These forces tended to drive men to bitter despair. Lastly in his daily life the individual had to face suffering in all its forms, and death itself which, especially when it happened to be premature, tragic or painful, inspired the utmost terror. What was the Mesopotamian reaction in the face of all these experiences which lent the lie to the theory of harmonious integration into the process of nature?

The trickery and caprice of the gods was often appealed to in order to account for the evils of life; thus the epic of Gilgamesh narrates how the plant of rejuvenation and vitality which the great hero got possession of with much labour was stealthily purloined! The ultimate reason for this tragedy is the decree of the gods that man should for ever remain mortal<sup>28</sup>. Or again what prompted the gods to decide upon the destruction of

27. The Sumerian rulers Urukagina of Lagash (24th cent. B. C.) and Ur-Nammu (about 2070-53 B. C.) were men who had the sense of social justice. The work done by these men will be discussed in the 1976 biblical issue of *Jeevadhara* which will be dealing with the problem of man's economic liberation.

28. *ANET*, p. 96.

mankind through the great flood was their own irrational fancy.<sup>29</sup> In persuasions of this type we have an affirmation of the sublime truth that there are events and experiences which man can never adequately account for.

As for illness, it was often attributed to malicious and malevolent demons, but not unfrequently this was regarded by religious-minded and pious folk as punishment for sins committed unwittingly and unknowingly by the invalid himself or even by his ancestors, cf. the following prayer of a sufferer:

“The sin of my father, my grandfather, my mother,  
My grandmother, my family, my relatives and my clan -  
Let it not come near me, let it go away from me!”<sup>30</sup>

The emphasis on sin in this prayer must be interpreted in the light of the firm conviction of the Mesopotamians that man remains a sinner from the first moment of his existence, that a general state of sinfulness permeates the whole of humanity. It is doubtless this awareness that has prompted an anonymous Sumerian poet to exclaim: “Never was a sinless child born to its mother!”<sup>31</sup> The sufferers naturally used to lament their sins and mourn over them, and pray for deliverance, promising at the same time that after they were saved they would sing the praises of the gods.

All this represents the average man’s reaction to the tragedies of life, but there were others who made it their concern to delve deep into the problem of evil, find out its hidden causes and even put forward rational explanations. One of the most interesting documents dealing with the ultimate reasons of a political tragedy that befell Mesopotamia is the *Lament over*

29. Compare the following words :

“Their ways are verily loathsome unto me...  
I will destroy, I will wreck their ways...”

(ANET, p. 61).

30. For the original text, cf. W. Kunstmüller, *Die babylonische Gebetsbeschwerung* (Leipziger Semitische Studien, N. F. 2, repr., Leipzig, 1968) p. 39.

31. There is also a second line which is not clear: “... a sinless youth has not existed from of old” (ANETSUP, p. 590).

*the Destruction of Ur*<sup>32</sup> a pseudo-theological, poetical composition in Sumerian which used to be recited during liturgical commemoration of the tragedy. In 2006 B. C. the great Sumerian city of Ur was destroyed by barbarian invaders, its inhabitants were put to death, and the ruler was taken captive. Material traces of the city's destruction have been found by archaeologists, and the sensation created by the terrible disaster was such that it was long remembered and lamented at least in different, elaborate elegies. Archaeologists have unearthed two of them which are conveniently designated the first and the second lamentation over the destruction of Ur. The former consists of eleven cantos and the latter of four. We shall consider here one of the cantos of the second poem which purports to be a dialogue between Nanna, the moon-god who was the tutelary deity of the city of Ur, and his father Enlil. Nanna asks Enlil:

"Father, my begetter, what has my city done to thee,  
Why hast thou turned from it?  
Enlil, what has my Ur done to thee,  
Why hast thou turned from it?" (lines 44f.)<sup>33</sup>

The father's reply is truly disheartening and leaves no hopes for the future. Though the gods have granted kingship to Ur, the city cannot expect to rule for ever, so that Nanna has to reconcile himself to its downfall. There is no possibility of a restoration of Ur to its pristine glory, and the poem thus comes to a close with an avowal of despair.<sup>34</sup>

Another pseudo-theological composition that is relevant here is the *Curse of Agade*<sup>35</sup>. This also deals with the reasons for the havoc wrought by the barbarians in Sumer. The poet's conclusion is that the tragedy was the outcome of a sacrilege which Naram-Sin, one of the kings of Accad (2280-2244 B. C.),

32. Discussions with introduction and notes in *ANET*, pp. 455-63; *ANETSup*, pp. 611-19. Cf. too C. J. Gadd, "The Second Lamentation for Ur," *Hebrew and Semitic Studies Presented to G. R. Driver* (Oxford, 1963) pp. 58-71. J. Krecher, *Sumerische Kultlyrik* (Wiesbaden, 1966).

33. Gadd, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

34. Krecher, *op. cit.*, pp. 50f.

35. *ANETSup*, pp. 646-51.

committed against the Ekur<sup>36</sup>, the holiest of the shrines of Sumer. The gods in anger abandoned Agade and even deprived it of its power and endowments, with the result that the city became weak and impoverished. On perceiving this, Naram-Sin repented his sin. After a period of seven years of penitence, however, he became insolent and proceeded to devastate and plunder the Ekur. As soon as this was done, Enlil in his wrath despatched barbarians into the land to destroy everything and to slaughter the inhabitants. Some of the gods, fearing that the whole of Sumer would be wiped out, decided to placate Enlil. With this end in view they cursed Agade and left it an eternal ruin. As in the second lament over Ur, here too the perspectives remain bleak, without any ray of hope for the future. Man has to pine away in utter despair.

In this connexion it is worth while making a survey of another series of compositions which belong to the 'wisdom' genre. All over the ancient world there were men who had made the pursuit of wisdom their programme of life, and for the sake of posterity (and at times also for their own glory) committed to writing their intuitions and insights. In what follows three Accadian texts are considered, which in their own way bear witness to the Mesopotamian reaction to the tragedies of life. There is, first of all, a poem which has, though inappropriately, been termed the "Babylonian Job"<sup>37</sup>. It begins with the statement *lulul bēl nōmeqi*, "I will praise the lord of wisdom," and goes on to give a graphic account of the experiences of a righteous man: a person of position and affluence and a model of piety. For no apparent reason, he comes to be abandoned by the gods, and every type of disease begins afflicting him. Reflection on the problem of his sufferings leads him at last to the conclusion that the decrees of the gods are inscrutable. The story comes to a close with a detailed account of three dreams, during which he is promised deliverance. Finally he recovers, and betakes himself to the temple of Marduk to perform the ceremony

36. This is a Sumerian name which means "Mountain (KUR) House" (E).

37. Transliterated text with translation in W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (Oxford, 1960) pp. 21-56. Cf. too *ANETSup*, pp. 596-600.

of public thanksgiving. In spite of its happy ending the book is a witness to human despair: the gods for no reason afflict men, and mortals have to accept the consequences of their caprice.

The next 'wisdom' text is known as the "Babylonian Theodicy"<sup>38</sup>. This is an acrostic poem<sup>39</sup> consisting of twenty-seven stanzas, each with eleven lines, and is composed in the form of a dialogue between two friends or partners. The sufferer was born late to his parents, and soon after became an orphan, and to his complaints the friend responds saying that a life of piety will never go unrewarded. He goes on to dwell upon the inscrutability of the divine mind, and warns the sufferer not to utter blasphemies as the wisdom of the gods cannot be fathomed. In the course of the discussion both declare that the powers on high have made men prone to injustice. The work comes to an end with the wretched man's plea to his companion to contemplate his misery and with a prayer to the gods to resume their protection of him.

The third work is a dialogue between a man and his slave, wherein suicide is regarded as life's *summum bonum*. The composition has therefore been styled the "Dialogue on Pessimism"<sup>40</sup>. On the interpretation of this poem scholars are not unanimous. Impressed by the apparently philosophical conceptions that come to the fore, some have regarded it as a treatise of great value. Others have arrived at the conclusion that it is a satire, or even a burlesque or farce. A third possibility, which has much in its favour, is that the writer who was a quite gifted person but susceptible to fits of melancholic depression. He began his work seriously, but because of his emotions and his inability to

38. Lambert, *op. cit.*, pp. 63-91. *ANETSup*, pp. 601-4.

39. The acrostic reads: *a-na-ku sa-ag-gi-il-ki-i-na-am-ub-ib ma-ás-ma-su ka-ri-bu sa i-li ú sar-ri*, "I Saggil-kinam-ubbib, the exorcist, am adorant of the gods and the king." Penetrating discussions in B. Landsberger, "Die babylonische Theodizee," *Zeitschrift fur Assyriologie* 43 (1936) pp. 32-76.

40. Lambert, *op. cit.*, pp. 139-49. *ANETSup*, pp. 600f.

check them ended up by producing a farce-like work.<sup>41</sup> To bring out the tenor of the dialogue here are two extracts and the conclusion.

"Servant, listen to me... I am going to make love to a woman." "So make love, master, make love. The man who makes love to a woman forgets sorrow and worry." "No, servant I will not make love to a woman." "Do not make love, master, do not make love. A woman is a pitfall, a hole, a ditch, a woman is a sharp iron dagger that slits a man's throat" (VI: 46-52). "Servant, listen to me... Quickly, get me water (to wash) my hands, please, so I can sacrifice to my god." "Sacrifice, master, sacrifice. The mind of the man who sacrifices to his god is at ease. He is making loan upon loan." "No servant, I will not sacrifice to my god." 'Do not sacrifice, master, do not sacrifice. You get your god to follow you about like a dog, whether he wants you to perform rites or (says), 'Do not consult your god,' or anything else' (VII: 53-62). "Servant, listen to me... Then what is good?" "To have my neck and yours broken and to be thrown into the river..." "No, servant, I will kill you and let you go first." "Then (I swear that) my master will not outlive me by even three days." (X: 78-86)<sup>42</sup>

What the discussions between the master and the slave bring to our notice is the shattering of faith not only in the very order of the cosmos but also in the willingness and the ability of the gods to safeguard it. This crumbling of the very foundations of religion and morality had a tremendous impact on the life and thought of the Mesopotamians. The loss of faith in traditional values gave rise to what an authority has called secularizing tendencies,<sup>43</sup> particularly among the Assyrians. These, in turn, made men defiant and insolent *vis-à-vis* the powers on high. There were even desperadoes who sought to

41. For this view, cf. E. A. Speiser, "The Case of the Obliging Servant," *Biblical and Oriental Studies* (Philadelphia, 1968) pp. 344-66.

42. *ANETSup*, p. 601.

43. Von Soden, "Religiöse Unsicherheit, Säkularisierungstendenzen und Aberglaube zur Zeit der Sargoniden," *Studia Biblica et Orientalia III* pp. 356-67.

ease their tension by uttering blasphemies. The virulent and vitriolic challenge that comes to expression in personal names such as *Lā-dāgil-ili* ("Not relying upon god") *Lā-ādir-ili* ("Not fearing god") and *Lā-taddar-ili* ("Do not fear god") is perhaps without any parallel in the history of mankind.<sup>44</sup>

Another tendency that manifested itself among the Assyrians must also be mentioned here, as it is quite indicative of the radical secularization that had taken place. For the purpose of political propaganda the gifted but eccentric and erratic Assyrian ruler Sennacherib (704-681 B. C.), who is mentioned in the Bible, ordered a narrative to be published in which Marduk, the widely-honoured god of Babylon, is represented as a criminal.<sup>45</sup> He is brought to trial, beaten and kept in prison as punishment for his crime which, in effect, is his failure to acknowledge the supremacy of Assur, the God of the Assyrians! In other words, an unscrupulous politician arrogates to himself the right to judge and condemn a god for the simple reason that he stands in the way of the realization of his imperialistic designs. The whole composition is, then, a frank denial of divine sovereignty.

According to Mesopotamian traditions man is the 'double' of the gods having in himself something divine since he was fashioned from the blood of one of the celestial beings. The purpose of his existence here on earth is the service of the gods, so that they may remain free of care and live in ease in heaven without anything to bother them. No Mesopotamian of the long centuries before the rise of secularization would have ever called in question the care and solicitude of the powers on high for their worshippers, even when he thought of religion as a mere process that affected him along with his gods. Aware of the dangers threatening him every side, he sought security and safety in the integration of himself into the universal process. However, when this endeavour proved futile, the

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44. Von Soden, *op. cit.*, pp. 365f.

45. Texts in transcription with translation and comments in von Soden, "Gibt es ein Zeugnis dafür, dass die Babylonier an die Wiederauferstehung Marduks geglaubt haben?" *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* N. F. 17 (1955) pp. 130-66.

Mesopotamian received a shock, to which he reacted in different ways. The discussions in part II have shown how this reaction to the unexpected situation in life arising from disillusionment ranged all the way from having recourse to the gods with confidence and perseverance to utter despair and insolent blasphemy. A peculiar feature of Mesopotamian anthropology is, then, the revolt of the 'double' of the gods in moments of despair, against the gods themselves.

The ultimate reason for this tragic reaction is of course the fact that the mystery of the cross was altogether unknown to the people of Mesopotamia. In addition, they had no knowledge of a personal God who is lord and master of history and directs its course to the goal he has himself fixed, i.e., they had no eschatological hope. When we turn to the people of Israel we find that their religion rested upon faith in a personal God, and this was most closely connected with an awareness of the meaning and sense of history. It was their faith that safeguarded them from despair and blasphemy.

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K. Luke

# Man in Genesis Chapters 1-11

The anthropology of the Old Testament is not homogeneous. It is pretty complex, so that it is utterly impossible to summarize it in a short article. There was the need, therefore, to be selective, and this contribution will restrict itself to what the first eleven chapters have to say about man and his situation in the world<sup>1</sup>. After the survey of Genesis 1-11 it will also be shown that the picture of man in the rest of the Old Testament is virtually the same as that of the opening chapters.

## Man, the concrete and dynamic image of God

*Genesis*, chapters 1-3, constitute a highly compact literary unit. They narrate how man who was created by God (chs. 1-2) soon fell into sin and became the object of divine wrath (ch. 3). Critics distinguish two different accounts of the origin of the world and man and assign them to the Priestly (P) (1:1-2:4a) and Yahwistic (J) (2:4b-25) traditions. The third chapter too belongs to the J source and purports to narrate the aftermath of man's creation. Here we shall consider the sections in Gen. 1-2 that deal with man's origin. Let us begin with the P narrative where man appears as the topmost point of a wonderful pyramid<sup>2</sup>.

The Priestly account was written down only in the post-exilic period, long after the Yahwistic account. However, its contents are ultimately derived from very early and even archaic traditions. Gen. 1:1 - 2:4a therefore preserves some of the oldest anthropological conceptions of the Israelites, for that matter, of the Semitic race at large. God deliberates before creating man: "Let us make" (v. 26). These words must be addressed to some-

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1. Exhaustive discussions with reference to all the sources in C. Westermann, *Genesis* (Biblischer Kommentar I/ 1, Neukirchen, 1974).

2. The Jewish exegete Benno Jacob, *Das erste Buch der Tora* (Berlin, 1937) writes: "In chapter 1 man is the pinnacle of a pyramid, in chapter 2 the centre of a circle" (cited by G. von Rad, *Genesis* [The Old Testament Library, London, 1961], p. 75).

body; otherwise the plural form of the verb does not make any sense. With whom, then, is God speaking? It is not right to say that the Father is deliberating with the Son and the Holy Spirit<sup>3</sup>. For the mystery of the Trinity was not known to the sacred writer. One cannot argue, either, that God, inasmuch as he possesses the fulness of being, is capable of conversing with himself; what we have here would then be a divine soliloquy<sup>4</sup>. This is too abstract an idea and as such unlikely. Exegetes now generally hold that God's words are addressed to the celestial beings who form his court. The Old Testament refers to them in a number of passages. Isaiah of Jerusalem, for example, in his inaugural vision saw Yahweh seated on a throne, but by his side were the seraphim (Is. 6:2); Micaiah son of Imlah too saw Yahweh and there were standing beside him on his right and left all the hosts of heaven (1 Kg. 22:19). Ps 82:1 refers to the divine council<sup>5</sup> and the gods who constitute it, and according to the book of Job satan too takes his stand near the divine throne (1:6. 2:1). Mesopotamian traditions as well, narrate how the gods deliberate together before doing anything important<sup>6</sup>. The creation of mankind was the crowning act of God's activities and therefore it called for mature deliberation.

"Man": in Hebrew *'ādām*. This is a word we are all familiar with. It occurs 539 times in the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, though its etymology remains obscure<sup>7</sup>. A detail the reader may find interesting must be mentioned here: Old

3. Such a view was held by the Fathers of the Church and by many theologians, not only in antiquity but also in the post-Tridentine period.

4. For this view, cf. *Jerusalem Bible*.

5. The Hebrew original has the expression *'ādat 'ēl* which occurs too in the Ugaritic texts. The equivalent in Accadian is *puhur ilāni* and in Sumerian *unkin*.

6. According to *Enuma Elish*, the Babylonian poem of creation, the gods held council and chose Marduk as their leader; they also invested him with royal dignity.

7. The etymology of this word is not clear; for a summary of the different theories put forward, cf. F. Maass, *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament I* (Stuttgart, 1973) cols. 82f.

Accadian texts<sup>8</sup> attest to the personal name Adamu<sup>9</sup>. One of the ancestors of the celebrated Assyrian emperor Shamshi-Adad I (1748–16 B. C.) bore this name<sup>10</sup>. The evidence from Mesopotamia should not be cited in favour of the historicity of the biblical Adam. Such a procedure would lead us to the absurd conclusion that the first man belonged to the Semitic race. In v. 26 the word '*ādām*' is not a proper name at all, but a collective noun which simply means 'man, mankind'. The inspired writer is not thinking of a single individual but rather of man in general. The sense therefore is: "Let us make mankind." This will become clearer still from later comments upon v. 27.

"In our image, after our likeness": The author uses two distinct prepositions ("in," "after"). This is quite in keeping with the literary traditions of ancient Israel<sup>11</sup>. To "image" corresponds Hebrew *šelem* (15 times in the Hebrew text). Occasionally it denotes statue(s) of pagan gods (2 Kg. 11:18. 2 Chr. 23:17. Ez. 7:20. Am. 5:26); it has also the meaning "molten statue" (Num. 33:52). In v. 26 the sense is altogether different. "Likeness" is the rendering of Hebrew *dēmût* (23 times in the original text of the OT). This is an abstract noun formed from the verb *dāmāh*, "to resemble, to be like", and some of its meanings are "shape, form of animals, men, parts of the body" (Ez. 1:5. 10. 22), "pattern, model" (2 Kg. 16:11), and "similarity to man, human hands", etc. (Ez. 8:2. 10:21) The expressions "image" and "likeness" are used as synonyms. The latter in some way limits and circumscribes the former; it is also secondary since it is left out in v. 27.

What does the P writer mean when he defines man as *imago Dei*? First he thinks of man in the concrete, as he exists on the level of experience. The whole man as a body-person is therefore the image of God. That is, the divine image takes

8. That is, the period roughly around 2500–2000 B. C.

9. Cf. I. J. Gelb, *Glossary of Old Akkadian* (Materials for the Assyrian Dictionary, No. 3, 2nd ed., Chicago, 1973) p. 19.

10. W. F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan* (Double-day Anchor Books, New York, 1969) p. 98, n. 119.

11. For the same sequence, cf. Is. 44:4, Hos. 10:5, Ps. 37:20, Job 34:36, 37:10 and Num. 24:1 (which is very archaic).

concrete form and shape in the human body with its erect stature<sup>12</sup>. It is unbiblical to understand v. 26 in terms of man's immortal soul, his rational nature, his intellect, etc. Secondly, the inspired writer considers the image of God in man dynamically, as consisting in activity. That is why he adds that man has to exercise dominion over the whole of material creation. The body-person who is the lord of the created world is the very *imago Dei*<sup>13</sup>.

V. 27 is poetical in form and consists of three lines:

"So God created man in his own image;  
in the image of God he created him;  
male and female he created them."

The pronoun "them" clearly shows that the poet is speaking of mankind and not of an individual. The new detail he adds here is that sexual differentiation has its origin ultimately from God<sup>14</sup>. V. 28 is the record of the blessing uttered by God. Its object is twofold, viz. fruitfulness and exercise of dominion over the whole world. God finally contemplated his work and found how exceedingly good it was (v. 31)<sup>15</sup>. Such, in short, is the figure of man in the first account of creation.

The picture of man in the second account is, at first sight, quite different from the preceding one. But a close

12. This point is emphasized by P. Humbert, "L'*imago Dei* dans l'Ancien Testament," *Etudes sur le récit du Paradis et de la chute dans la Genèse* (Neuchâtel, 1940) pp. 153-75, and L. Koehler, "Die Grundstelle der *Imago-Dei*-Lehre," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 4 (1948) pp. 16-22.

13. Col. 1:15 describes Christ as the image of the invisible God. This statement is to be understood concretely (i. e., the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth is the image) and dynamically (i. e., he, in himself, reveals to man God who is invisible).

14. The Hebrew word for female, *nēbāqāh* lit. means "perforata." The meaning of *zākār*, "male," is not clear, though some scholars think that the sense is "perforator."

15. The usual translation of this clause is, "God saw that it was very good" (similarly also, "God saw that it was good"). The rendering given in the text is to be preferred to the common one. Goodness here means that what God created was exactly what he wanted it to be.

examination shows that there is basic agreement between the two narratives. For the J writer man is the centre of a circle. The account of his origin includes a pun: "The Lord God formed<sup>16</sup> 'ādām of dust from the 'ādāmāh" (v. 7)<sup>17</sup>. Man is the one whom God fashioned from the ground. He is dust into which God breathed the principle of life. This principle makes him a psycho-physical self which is the object of the reader's experience. The J writer emphasizes the dynamic element in man when he says that he has to till and keep the garden (v. 15). He exercises dominion over the world of creatures by giving them names (v. 20). In his original way the J writer thus teaches that man is the image of God.

Sexual differentiation too is the result of God's activity, and the close affinity between man and woman is brought to the reader's notice with the story of the woman's formation from man's rib. There is a pun in v. 23: "She shall be called *'issāh* because she was taken out of *'is*". The force of the original can be expressed with the help of Sanskrit: "She shall be called *nārī* because she was taken out of *narah*". The idea of the rib seems to have been inspired by Sumerian tradition<sup>18</sup>. The god Enki became sick. One of the parts of his body that was affected was *ti* (in Sumerian "rib"). To cure him a goddess was created. She bore the name *Nin-ti*, "the lady who causes to live". Now *ti* has in Sumerian the meaning "to cause to live, to make live" as well. This play on words cannot be reproduced in Hebrew which has two distinct roots to denote the two notions conveyed by Sumerian *ti*. The second notion survives in the name *Hawwāh*, "She who causes to live".

The first man and his wife lived in a garden of delights (2:9), containing trees that were pleasant to the sight and good

16. The Hebrew base *yāṣar*, used here by the J writer, denotes the potter's activity.

17. The idea that man was formed from the earth was widespread in the ancient orient (cf. the first article in this issue).

18. Cf. S. N. Kramer, *Mythologies of the Ancient World* (Doubleday Anchor Books, New York, 1961) p. 103.

for food. Two trees – the tree of life and the one of knowledge<sup>19</sup> – are specially singled out by the sacred writer. The symbolism of the first is clear enough, and that of the second will be discussed in the next section. The two were naked<sup>20</sup> and were not ashamed to be so (v. 25). Absence of shame in the face of nudity only means that they had nothing to hide from each other. They were guiltless and guileless like children in their reciprocal dealings. The need to cover themselves and thus withhold something from the partner's gaze arose only after the loss of innocence (3:7. 10-11). In this predicament God himself came to their rescue (3:21).

Gen. chs. 1-2 do not explicitly speak of man's life of fellowship with God. It is nonetheless presupposed by the inspired writers. Created in God's own likeness, man receives a special blessing from God; the whole world is made subject to him; he can freely eat of the produce of the earth. In all these instances man appears as the object of the creator's benevolence. This is also the case when in Gen. 2 he is said to be living in paradise. God's solicitude for him is such that he provides him with a counterpart. Yahweh converses with him, and he also speaks freely with his God. All this is indicative of the close familiarity between God and man.

19. Sumerian sources speak of *gis-ti*, "tree of life" (*gis* = tree; *ti* = life) which stands at the gate of heaven. That there was also a tree of truth is clear from the Sumerian divine name *Nin-gis-zi-da*, "lord of the tree of truth" (*nin* = lord; *zi* = truth; *da*, genitive particle). The parallelism between the traditions of Mesopotamia and Israel is really striking:

<i>gis-zt-da</i>	:	tree of knowledge
<i>gis-ti</i>	:	tree of life.

Two more trees mentioned by Sumerian sources are *gis-ká-an-na*, "tree of the gate (*ká*) of (*na*) heaven" (*an*), and *gis-gán-abzu*. "tree of the shoot (*gán*) of the abyss." Discussion with references to sources in E. Dhorme, *Recueil Edouard Dhorme* (Paris, 1951) pp. 557-60.

20. In Hebrew 'ārām; this term also means "cunning" and occurs again in 3:1 as a qualification of the serpent.

### Man the rebel

We now come to Gen. 3, the story of man's "fall". At a time when Christians believed that the world was created some four thousand years before the birth of Christ, the narrative used to be taken in the literal sense. But such an understanding is not valid any more. We should not historicize the narrative, nor can we say that it is the exact record of something that took place in the first days of man's existence on the face of this earth. There is as much of history in Gen. 3 as in the statement that 'ādām was formed from the dust of 'adāmāh or that the woman was fashioned from a male rib. Gen. 3 is a story meant to inculcate a religious truth, and a very profound one at that. What is this special lesson?

Man comes daily face to face with suffering, sin and death, and he invariably seeks an explanation of these phenomena. Sufferings in their manifold forms and death, particularly when it happens to be premature, are evils whose origin remains to be clarified. For the Yahwist who had faith in a personal God, they could only be the outcome of man's actions. Like the other peoples of antiquity,<sup>21</sup> the Israelites were firmly convinced that in the remote past there was a golden age when men were immortal and free from suffering. This era of bliss whose author was Yahweh himself somehow came to an end and there commenced the present age of sin, suffering and misery. What could have been the reason for the sudden end of the period of bliss? Well, it could only have been sin. God himself, as punishment for sin, expelled man from paradise and imposed on him suffering and death. Such was the reasoning that led the biblical writers to the idea of a primordial sin. And they have given literary expression to their conclusion in the form of the story we now have in Gen. 3.

God forbade man to partake of the fruit of the tree of knowledge (2:17). This prohibition was so serious that death was attached to it as sanction. Some kind of knowledge is, then, forbidden to man under pain of death. What is its exact nature? There is a popular belief that the knowledge in question here is

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21. The Sumerians had their own paradise which was known by the name Dilmun (probably the island of Bahrain)

the sexual one. This theory, to be brief, is not at all likely<sup>22</sup>, for God himself wanted the man and woman to become one flesh. Furthermore, the author cannot be thinking of omniscience which is proper only to God, nor can he have had in mind mere moral discernment which all men possess, precisely because they are men. It can therefore be concluded that what is meant is the exercise of perfect autonomy, total independence of God. Without any regard to his lord and master and his will, man chooses for himself that which he finds good and rejects that which he regards as evil. This type of knowledge is forbidden to man, for it is ultimately a denial of God.

In Gen. 3 man appears as the fallible being *par excellence*. He is free, but he has to use his freedom in such a way that he does not go against, or violate, the rights of his creator and lord. His freedom is not absolute; he cannot claim complete independence of God, and if ever he arrogates to himself such autonomy, he becomes guilty of the sin of disobedience, rebellion against God himself. The creator cannot tolerate such insolence and pride. He will intervene without more ado and punish him. This is the lesson the J writer teaches in Gen. 3.

At this point it is worth while adding a few comments on the text of Gen. 3. The tempter is called *hannāhās*, "the serpent" (with the definite article). The Hebrew noun *nāhās* is doubtless of artistic evolution through metathesis, from the name of a Mesopotamian divinity, *Sahan*. Serpent-gods were well known in the ancient Semitic world. The Israelites too used to worship in the temple the figure of a serpent that was supposed to have been made by Moses (2Kg. 18:4). The polemic intention in Gen. 3 is therefore beyond doubt. The serpent's words to the woman (v. 1) are not a question but a deliberate misconstruing and distorting of facts. The proper rendering would be, "Even though the Lord

22. However, traces of sexual symbolism are not absent from Gen. 3. The serpent was a deity connected with sex. In depicting this creature as the villain *par excellence*, the author is condemning superstitious practices prevalent among his contemporaries.

God told you not to eat of *any* tree in the garden...."<sup>23</sup> On hearing this the woman hastens to clear the misunderstanding.

In the serpent's insinuation (v. 4) the expression "knowing<sup>24</sup> good and evil" is ambivalent. It can mean either, "You shall be like the gods<sup>25</sup> who know good and evil;" or, "You shall be like the gods, and you shall know good and evil". The knowledge in question here is experiential, implying an activity or process and its end-result. The special knowledge divine beings alone possess remains forbidden to man. For any mortal to try to arrogate it to himself is to be guilty of the sin of pride and arrogance.

The opening of the eyes and the feeling of shame (v. 7) mean that the man and the woman were affected by the experience of guilt. The sense of guilt in its turn gave rise to fear (v.8). The account of God's questioning of the couple (vv. 9-13) deserves to be carefully noted: the man shifts the blame to the woman and the latter in her turn to the serpent. This order is reversed in the record of punishment (vv. 14-19): the victim becomes instrumental in the punishment of the culprit. The woman who was duped by the serpent turns hostile to it and gives birth to the seed that will crush its head (v. 15).<sup>26</sup> The man who has been beguiled by the woman is made her lord, and she becomes subject to him (v. 16). Lastly man is punished by God himself (vv. 17-19).

23. Cf. E. A. Speiser, *Genesis* (The Anchor Bible, New York, 1964) p. 21.

24. The Hebrew text uses the active participle. It is put in genitival relation with the two ensuing words. The idiom in the original is untranslatable; "having the knowledge of good and evil" is an approximate rendering.

25. The Hebrew word 'elôhîm can mean "God" or "gods."

26. V. 15 is known as *protoevangelium*, "the first gospel." In the exegesis of this text two extremes are to be avoided, namely, the mariological understanding and the purely aetiological interpretation. The text is not trying to explain why women are afraid of serpents, nor does it speak of the Messiah and his mother. At the most it hints at a future victory of humanity over the pernicious serpent.

V. 22, "Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil," has been interpreted in different ways by exegetes. Some have thought that God's words are sarcastic. But in the solemn context of vv. 22-24 irony is certainly out of place. The obvious sense seems to be that God is merely stating what has happened: man in his pride has made himself like the gods, and he may now go on to eat of the tree of life and become immortal. The following rendering of v. 22 is quite appropriate: "Now that the man has become like one of us discerning good from bad, what if he should put out his hand and taste also of the tree of life and eat and live forever!"<sup>27</sup>

Gen. 3 must be interpreted as the story of man's revolt against God. It now forms the sequel to the account of the origins in the two preceding chapters: though created in God's image and destined for fellowship with God, man became a rebel; hence all the sufferings and miseries of this life.

### Man's degradation

Gen. 4-11 must be studied and interpreted in close conjunction with chs. 1-3. The story of Adam's descendants (ch. 4) serves to show how man's sin against God was immediately followed by a sin against his neighbour: Cain murdered his brother Abel (4: 1-16). Sin now begins to increase by leaps and bounds. Lamech, one of Cain's descendants, took excessive vengeance (4:23-24). The climax of wickedness was reached when celestial beings contracted marriages with women whom they found fit for child-bearing (6: 1-4).<sup>28</sup> This narrative is ideologically related to the story of man's endeavour to become like the gods. However, the matrimonial alliance with divine beings did not make man immortal. On the contrary, he remained mortal and even became the object of God's anger. The story of the flood (6: 5-8:22) shows how God judges and condemns sinful man.

Unfortunately, even after the deluge man persisted in sin. Thus Noah became intoxicated, and one of his sons saw his

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27. Speiser, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

28. What we have here is a very old myth, narrating how giants were born. The statement that the daughters of men were fair is not to be understood in terms of physical beauty.

nakedness (9: 20-27). Noah's descendants for their part showed their pride by endeavouring to build the tower of Babel (11:1-9). Naturally God intervened and scattered them all over the world.

The discussions on Gen. I-11 can be summed up as follows: man is a sinner. It is true that there were a few individuals who were good, but the vast majority proved to be rebels against God. The 'image' of God, in the end, turns out to be the great rebel. The most consoling thing about Gen. 1-11 is that this rebel is represented also as the object of God's love and solicitude. Yahweh, for example, did not put man to death even though he was threatened with this penalty (2: 17); he even made clothing for the man and his wife (3: 21). Cain was assured of protection (4: 15). And after the flood the Lord set aside this punitive weapon (9: 11). God does all this realizing fully well that "the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth" (8: 21). Human sinfulness cannot, however, impede God's exercise of his goodness: 'While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease' (8: 22). The Father in heaven causes his sun to rise and his rains to fall upon man the great rebel.

The rest of the Old Testament too delineates man as a rebel who nonetheless remains the object of God's benevolence. In Deuteronomic history we see how Yahweh punishes his people for their sinfulness, but there is always the possibility of conversion and salvation. For the prophets man is a rebel to whom God incessantly addresses the call to conversion. The sages in Israel were not much concerned with the fact of sin; they were always trying to keep man away from sin. Human fallibility is for them something self-evident. The horror they experience at the prospect of fallible man's failure is highlighted by the book of Qoheleth.

...     ...     ...     ...     ...

According to the Old Testament man is the divine *imago* turned perverse. Though made a little less than divine beings (Ps. 8: 5), he showed himself untrue to his special status. It may not be an exaggeration to state that Gen. 3 synthesizes all that the Old Testament has to say about man and his existential situation. Let us try to understand the significance this account has for modern man.

Several thinkers have brought to our notice the fact that man bears in himself some "ontological" defect. They speak of man's "fallenness," "fallibility," etc.<sup>29</sup> As they do so, they are just expressing with the help of philosophical categories a truth long ago proclaimed by the Scriptures. Man is a creature, mortal, subject to suffering and death, and capable of misusing his freedom to his own detriment. The state of creatureliness implies the possibility of man's becoming a rebel. This is his tragedy.

Man is selfish. Human selfishness manifests itself in so many overt and covert ways. The worst form it takes is man's preferring of his own self to God and his neighbour. Sin against God and one's brethren is selfishness in all its crudeness and ugliness. The Bible is never tired of reminding man of this humiliating truth.

The only way out of this tragic situation is God's gracious help. When a pious man, feeling the weight of sin, prays, "Create in me a clean heart" (Ps. 51:10), he is asking God to deliver him from the consequences of his own fallibility. God's answer to this prayer is also recorded in the Bible: "A new heart I will give you ... I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh" (Ez. 36:26). God's power and benevolence are the only hope of salvation for man the rebel.

The New Testament presents to us a man in whom fallibility transcended. Christ as man is one who in spite of his creatureliness, is not subject to fallibility. He is also the one who is most unselfish. In obedience to God and on behalf of sinful man, he emptied himself and underwent death. Christ's *kenōsis* (self-emptying) is the highest example of obedience to God and of selflessness. It is also the source of hope for man who has rebelled against God.

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29. Cf. P. Ricoeur, *Fallible Man* (Chicago, 1965); *The Symbolics of Evil* (New York, 1968). This latter work includes survey of the biblical tradition.

# Man in the Preaching of Jesus

Jesus' mission here on earth was immediately and directly concerned with man; his preaching rests upon a definite conception of man, though he has not bothered to give us a synthesis of his anthropology. The vision of Jesus follows the pattern set by the prophets of Israel, but goes beyond it. Man now stands irrevocably situated between salvation and perdition. Thus Jesus discloses the paradox of man's existence before God as judge and gracious Father. Jesus does not describe the nature of man in abstract terms but brings man to the crisis of decision and thereby to his authentic existence. He does not paint any picture of the ideal man. True to the tenets of Old Testament thought, he finds reality in the true sense in history. It is with man as he exists in concrete history that Jesus is concerned and it is to him that his message is addressed. In this paper an attempt is made to bring out some aspects of Jesus' idea of man.

## Man the sinner

Jesus regards all men as sinners and subjects them all to God's demand for a radical conversion (Mk. 1:15). Man has departed from God; he does not see God's activity in everyday events of the world. The thought of omnipotence is to him an empty speculation. God is the distant God. That means, man stands in the world alone, without God, given over to fate and death like the prodigal son in the strange land.<sup>1</sup> However, God is the near God, which can only mean that the very sense of insecurity that characterizes the life of man separated from his lord, arises from the fact that God is seeking him. And that God is seeking man can only mean that God imposes his claims upon him. Man is separated from God. This evidently means that man does not fulfil God's demand upon him. Man can never control the world and its possibilities and find security in it; rather the whole world stands under the curse of remoteness from God. The curse is there even if man does not recognize it.

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1. R. Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word* (London, 1962) p. 194.

Jesus does not discuss how large a proportion of mankind is sinful, even when he calls his contemporaries and adulterous and sinful generation.<sup>2</sup> Sin is something condemned by God in the concrete, in the present moment. I cannot distinguish myself from my sin because I am myself the sinner. Sin is not a sort of appendage to man. It is a characteristic of man's concrete situation. Hence Jesus' preaching is addressed to sinful men.

Jesus also does not discuss the nature of sin since this is for him and his hearers a self-evident proposition, corresponding to the Jewish thought in which he shares. Sin is a characteristic of the man who is remote from God and who denies the claims of God. Since the thought of God's claim and the need of decision are more radically conceived by Jesus than they were in Judaism, his concept of sin is also more radical.

Because the crisis of decision in the present moment gives man his essential character (cf. below) he cannot console or justify himself by viewing his sin as a weakness which forms no part of his true nature, or as a mistake which is an exception to be outweighed by appealing to the normal self. For since the whole man is compelled to decision, the whole man is here at stake and determines by his choice his whole future. Nor can man in the face of this call to repentance point to his ideal self which lies outside the realm of empirical fact. His sins do not mark a stage in his moral development. They are the position in which he is wholly involved, so that he cannot by virtue of a better self escape from it. He stands before God as a sinner, that is, his sin has not a relative but absolute character. He is condemned and can appeal to nothing which he has ever been or has ever achieved. At this point the deeper radicalism of Jesus becomes evident; for Judaism still assumed the value of human achievement or at least allowed the repentance of man to have value as a quality which recommends him to God.<sup>3</sup>

#### **Man the special object of God's love in spite of his sinfulness**

If there is any help for man who is a sinner it can only be God's forgiveness, which transforms him into a "son of God."

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2. J. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (London, 1957) p. 125.

3. Bultmann, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

The highest that can be said of man, the final word, is that he is a "son of God."<sup>4</sup> God is our Father. We are not by nature children of God because we are human beings but have become children by God's free choice and the deeds he has done for us. Man can be a son of God in obedience to God through his delivering act. Thus sonship to God is neither self-evident nor natural, belonging to man as man. Rather it is a miracle. Man is seen here by Jesus not as what he really is outside his concrete life but precisely as what he is in it.<sup>5</sup>

The possibility of such sonship exists for all men and one cannot point to particular men as having the special quality of being the sons of God. The Father in heaven care for all men (Mt. 6:26, Cf. 5:45) and all men are to turn to him with their petitions (Mt. 7:7-11). Here too the distant God is at the same time the near one, but for natural man he is remote. Sonship is not something which man claims or which he can take for granted. Even in the strange land the prodigal son was the father's son and the father, though distant, was his father. But in the strange land, the fact that he is a son is a judgment against him and when he realizes his position, a source of grief. His sonship gives him no claim; it only gives the hope of the father's forgiving love and forgiveness alone makes the son once more a son. "This my son was dead and is again alive, he was lost and is again found" (Lk. 15:24).

When Jesus describes God as the Father of mankind ("your Father;" cf. Mt. 5:48. 6:32. 7:11. Mk. 11:25; "thy Father;" cf. Mt. 6:4.18), and when he trains his disciples to address him as (our) Father in their prayers (Mt. 6:9. Lk. 11:2) he proclaims the universal Fatherhood of God in the sense that God's fatherly love, kindness and protection are extended to every man, even to the sinner (Lk. 5:1-32). This does not mean that Jesus was promising divine sonship to all men as well.

4. J. B. Bauer, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology* (New York, 1961) p. 865.

5. Bultmann, *op. cit.*, p. 194.

### The Father who cares for and ministers to each child

The Lord's prayer reveals God as one most concerned with things infinitely great and infinitely small. Everything from the one far off divine event to which the whole of creation moves to the daily provision for the least of his creatures is the object of his care. Everything that concerns a man from his highest ideals to his humblest needs, may thus be taken in prayer to the Father. The will of the Father covers the whole life of man and the whole man may enter into communion with the Father. Jesus teaches men about the Father by teaching them to pray to the Father, to submit their whole life to his loving care and holy purpose. For Jesus the Father was the supreme reality of the world and of his own life. His preaching makes the Father have the same place and power in the life of his disciples as in his that they too may be heirs of God and joint-heirs with him<sup>6</sup>.

### Man whom God calls to a radical decision, to radical obedience.

The message of Jesus is an eschatological one, the proclamation that now fulfilment of the promise is at hand, that the kingdom of God is near. "Happy are the eyes that see what you see. For I tell you, many prophets and kings have desired to see what you see and have not seen it; to hear what you hear but have not heard it" (Lk. 10:23 f. Cf. Lk. 6:20 f.). The promise of the prophets is fulfilled (Mt. 11:5). The time of joy begins, mourning and fasting are over; it is the festal time; salvation is close at hand.

By acknowledging and accepting one's poverty, one is led to total obedience to God<sup>7</sup>. The serious factor in refusing to accept one's impoverished state is the refusal to live under the guidance of someone else. This was the attitude of the Israelites in the desert. They refused to live by relying only on God. In

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6. T. W. Manson, *The Teaching of Jesus* (London, 1963) pp. 114f.

7. G. Hughes, *Growth in the Holy Spirit* (London, 1966) pp. 100-17.

the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican we are told that God does not despise the attitude of the poor man. "But the publican standing afar off, would not so much as lift up his eyes to heaven but kept striking his breast, saying, 'O God, be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went home justified rather than the other'" (Lk. 18:13f.). Thus by accepting and even willing our poverty, we do not rejoice in our state of need but rejoice in the fact that it is *an opportunity to depend on someone else.*

"Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mk. 1:15). This message of Jesus is based on the certainty that the kingdom of God is beginning. His own activity is a definite sign for his followers that the kingdom of God is imminent. It is absurd and presumptuous to ask for a specific sign as evidence (Mk. 8:11). Man has to give absolute and unconditional response to this invitation which comes from God. The cleverness of the men of this world is foolishness since they know that, when the fig tree begins to grow green, the summer is coming; they can interpret the signs of the sky, clouds and winds, to give weather forecasts; but they do not understand the signs of the present age and do not know that it is the last hour (Mk. 13:28 f. Lk. 12:54-56).

In the last hour, the hour of decision, Jesus is sent with the final, decisive word. Happy is he who understands and is not offended at him (Mt. 11:6). Decision is inevitably for him or against him: "He who is not with me is against me and he who does not gather with me scatters" (Mt. 12:30). Now is the time of decision: "Follow me and let the dead bury their dead" (Mt. 8:22). "For the sake of the kingdom of God" involves complete renunciation, and brings every man face to face with an ultimate Either-Or. To decide for the kingdom is to sacrifice everything for it (Mt. 13:44-46. Cf. 5:29 f.).

There are people who for the sake of the kingdom have made themselves eunuchs (Mt. 19:12). The road to deliverance leads through the narrow gate only; the many on the broad way are travelling to destruction (Mt. 7: 13f.). This call to decision is the call to repentance. Many cling to this world and do not muster energy to decide wholly for God. They do desire the

kingdom but they desire it along with other things such as riches and the respect of other men. They are not ready for radical decision and conversion. When the invitation to the kingdom comes to them, they are claimed by various other interests (Lk. 14: 16-24).

The call to the kingdom of God is an invitation which is at the same time a demand. Those who are invited must put the kingdom of God above all other things. The call makes its claim not on man's frivolous desire for pleasure but on his will. The word of invitation is at the same time a word of warning (Lk. 14: 28-32).

A man therefore should think seriously before he decides to respond to this invitation. A ready acceptance in words has no value. An act of the will is required (Lk. 6: 46 ff.). How far must devotion and readiness for self-sacrifice be carried? "If any man comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother... and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple" (Lk. 14: 26). In two brief narratives we are shown how this decisive Either-Or dominates the preaching of Jesus, how every other interest disappears before the exclusiveness of God's demand (Lk. 11: 27f. Mk. 8: 31-33).

Jesus sees the conduct of man from the viewpoint of obedience (Lk. 17; 7-10. 20: 1-15). It is true that radical obedience exists only when a man inwardly assents to what is required of him, when the thing commanded is seen as intrinsically God's command, when the whole man stands behind what he does, or better when the whole man is in what he does, when he is doing something obediently but when he is essentially obedient. Obedience is radically conceived and involves man's whole being. This means that the whole man is under the necessity of decision. There is no neutrality for him, for he has to decide between the only two possibilities of his life, between God and evil. "You cannot serve both God and mammon" (Mt. 6: 24).

Is this demand for radical obedience contradicted by the thought of reward and punishment?<sup>8</sup> Reference is made to reward/ punishment (Mt. 6: 19f. 10: 28. Mk. 9: 43-47. 10: 21), but

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8. Bultmann, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

it is clear that Jesus demanded obedience without any secondary motive. And Jesus is wholly certain that man does receive reward or punishment from God. These are only consequences of the conduct of man. They cannot serve as motives. Jesus' attitude is indeed paradoxical. He promised reward to those who are obedient without the thought of reward. Here too Jesus recognizes an Either-Or: reward either from God or from man, but reward awaits every right action (Mt. 6: 1-8, 16-18). Jesus knows nothing of doing good for its own sake. The idea that every good deed is its own reward is foreign to him. Here a humanistic conception of man is presupposed. According to Jesus' view man does not win value for himself but if he is obedient God rewards him, gives him more than he has or can desire. The reward for kindness shown is joy and gratitude which are awokened by it. This reward can never be the motive of the act. So also the man who is obedient is enriched by God. At this point Jesus' conception is opposed to a specifically ascetic attitude, that is, to the belief that self-annihilation is the behaviour demanded by God. Self-denial and sacrifice are indeed required of man but God is not represented as a self tyrant who requires death from man. His demand means life. Behind this demand there is indeed the call to share in Jesus' own experiences, the experience of his death and resurrection.

#### **Man called to share in Jesus' own experiences**

The New Testament calls Jesus the Servant of God<sup>9</sup> (Mt. 12: 18. Acts 3: 13. 26. 4: 27. 30). Since in the New Testament Israel too, and specifically David, are described as the Servant of Yahweh (God), we cannot be certain that in the christological use of the title Jesus is always to be regarded as the Isaian Servant of God. It is probable that Jesus is thought of as the Servant of God first and foremost simply in the sense of being the Just One who obeys, who fulfils the will of God without reserve. However, Jesus himself, as also the apostolic preachers, have viewed his messianic service in the light of the Isaian prediction concerning the Servant of God.

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9. W. Zimmerli-J. Jeremias, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* Vol. v, p. 700.

In the logion on ransom (Mk. 10:45), in the words of Jesus expressing the significance of the distribution of the chalice in the Eucharist,<sup>10</sup> in the silence of Jesus at his trial (Mt. 26:62f. 27:12, 14. Mk. 14:61. Lk. 23:9. Jn. 19:9), etc. the theme of the Servant of Yahweh (52-53) is presupposed. The teaching concerning messianic suffering and death is bound up in the mind of Jesus with his sense of vocation, Jesus knew that he was the Messiah who had to suffer. This is the great paradox, the originality of his message.

The striking correspondence between the predicted state of the Son of Man and the actual fate of Jesus may blind us to another striking correspondence between the Son of Man predictions and the demand made by Jesus on his disciples. Again and again it is impressed upon them that discipleship is synonymous with sacrifice and suffering and the cross itself. This at once suggests that what in the mind of Jesus was that he and his followers together should share the destiny which he describes as the passion of the Son of Man, that he and they together be the Son of man, the remnant that serves by service and self-sacrifice as the organ of God's redemptive purpose in the world.

In the Gospel one at least of the disciples - Peter - is represented as offering to go with Jesus even to death (Jn. 13:37) and his enthusiasm carries the others with him. It is to be noted that Jesus does not reject this offer: he knew that the resolution of his followers would break down when the crisis came, but there is not a hint that he would not have allowed them to go to the cross with him had their courage not failed. The evidence is all the other way. It is surely significant that the first announcement was made by the question addressed to James and John: "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am to be baptized" (Mk. 10:38).

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10 The Eucharistic cup is the "blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many" (Mk. 14:24). The passive voice emphasizes the action of God, the sense being, "poured out by God himself." The verb here pre-supposes Is. 53:12 where the Servant of Yahweh is said to have "poured out his soul to death." Discussions in Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (London: 1955).

In Mk. 8:34 three conditions are laid down which must be fulfilled by a loyal follower of Jesus. Two are decisive acts and a third is a continuous relationship. The first is self-denial. The second is to accept the last consequences of taking up the cross, i. e., the stake, or the cross as an instrument of death<sup>11</sup>. The Markan reference leaves it in no doubt that the latter is meant. The idea is metaphorical but mystical as in Gal. 2:20; the last risk is to be taken. It is by no means necessary to suppose that the metaphor is christian in the sense that the crucifixion of Christ is implied. If the ideal of cross-bearing is not found in earlier rabbinic literature, death by crucifixion under the Romans was a sufficiently familiar sight to be the basis of the saying. The third requirement is sustained loyalty in discipleship. It is only in the case of the man who consciously wills discipleship that the demands are relevant.

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The above analysis of the idea of man in the preaching of Jesus is in no way complete. Deeper and further explorations of the meaning of the parables, the teachings and examples of Christ, etc. will certainly furnish us with clearer and more penetrating insights into the nature of man whom Jesus encounters in his earthly life, in the course of the exercise of his ministry here on earth. Christian life as it is lived by man today is and should be an uninterrupted, dynamic and personal encounter of man with Christ in his paschal mystery. In other words every idea in our christian life must find its place in the framework of redemption, namely, in Christ. No grace comes to man the prodigal apart from participation in Christ's death and resurrection. Man must identify himself with Christ in his death, in his total self-renunciation, in order that he may share in the power and glory of his resurrection. This is the essence of the response that man whom God loves and redeemed through Christ is called upon to make: a radical act of obedience to the demands of God in Christ.

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# The Tragedy of Man according to St Paul

In a sermon delivered in the jail in Basel, Karl Barth related the following parable:

You all know the story of the horseman who, at night and in a thick fog, rode unknowingly across a frozen lake. On reaching the other side and learning where he came from, he was so frightened that he collapsed. Such is the situation of man when the heavens open, earth lights up and we are given to hear: "You have been saved by grace". For when we hear this, we look behind us and ask ourselves: Where was I? Just above an abyss, in the greatest danger of death! What have I done? The most senseless thing! In which condition was I? I was doomed but now I am saved. Who cannot understand what has happened!<sup>11</sup>

This is a good summary of Paul's theology. For Paul, the discovery of light reveals the darkness in which man was. The experience of being saved entails that of being lost. Christian joy and confidence soar from a tragic sense of the hopelessness of man's condition.

This contrast is brought out in the beginning of the Epistle to the Romans by an antithesis that summarizes the whole of it:

In it (the Gospel) *is revealed* God's way of righting men with himself ... For God's wrath *is revealed* coming down from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness... (Rom 1:17-18).

The Christian experience consists in a double revelation. Basically there is a revelation of salvation, of being set right with God. But this discovery entails the opposite revelation of

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1. K. BARTH, *Aux Captifs, la Liberté*. Genève, 1959, p. 41.

man's desperate condition. The two parts of the statement are connected by the conjunction "for" (*gar*) which baffles the translators. Often (TEV, NAB, JB) they prefer to leave it untranslated. Yet it is very meaningful. It means that there is a mutual causality between the two "revelations": the revelation of God's love and of man's tragic condition are intertwined. There cannot be genuinely Christian experience of the one without the other. This is what Paul proceeds to analyse in the first seven chapters of his letter to the Romans.

### I. A World in Chaos (Rom 1-3)

The phrase "wrath of God" calls for attention. In his commentary on this passage, C.H. Dodd remarks that Paul uses the expression only 3 times (Rom 1:18; Col 3:6; Eph 5:6). He never uses the verbal form: "God is angry". He frequently uses the absolute word "wrath" in a curiously impersonal way (1 Thes 1:10; 2:16; Rom 2:5; 3:5; 4:15; 5:9; 9:22; 12:19; 13:5; Eph 2:3)<sup>2</sup>. This usage shows that while borrowing the phrase 'Wrath of God' from the Old Testament he does not see it as a certain feeling or attitude of God. It is simply the Wrath in itself, something objective, a calamitous situation arising from a deep disorder rather than from the will of God. In Rom 2:8-9, it is connected with "tribulation" (*thlipsis*) and "calamity" (*stenochôria*), two terms describing the eschatological throes of a world going to ruin.

This collapse or falling into chaos was described by the Jewish apocalyptic literature in terms of the darkened sun, waning moon, falling stars (cf. Mt. 24:29), earthquakes, thunder and lightnings (cf. Rev. 16:18-21). It is the same frightful epiphany of evil that Paul has in mind when he describes the revelation of the Wrath. But he does it in existential terms. The godless man (vv 19-23) becomes possessed by a kind of madness (vv 21-22) ending in the prostitution of sex (vv 24-27) and the perversion of social relations (vv 28-31). It should be noticed that all the vices listed in vv 28-31 (except the second one in v. 31: haters of God) are social depravations, affecting the life of man with his

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2. C. H. DODD, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, Fotana ed., 1959, p. 48

fellowmen. One is reminded of the structure of the first chapters of Genesis; estrangement from God (Gen 3) results in the collapse of the whole texture of human society: family strife (Gen 4: 1-16), tribal warfare (4:23-24), in a process that ends ultimately in cosmic destruction (the Flood: Gen 6-8).

Rom 1 develops a similar theme. Paul's description of the sinful world is dramatized. He borrows his adjectives from the traditional stock of Jewish anti-pagan propaganda. But his aim is not to abuse the Gentiles or to draw a picture of the Roman world. Elsewhere he acknowledges that pagans may be circumcised in heart (Rom 2:26-29). He goes on to add that the Jews are no better than the pagans. Paul does not write as a historian or as a sociologist but as a theologian.

But Paul's theology is not moral theology. It is a theology of history. He does not want to prove that estrangement from God leads to all kinds of vices. Neither does he expound the misery of the sinner or the logic of sin, understood in an individual manner. As we saw, the background of Paul's thought is eschatological and apocalyptic (God's righteousness/wrath is revealed: *apokaluptetai*). In the epistle to the Romans as in apocalyptic literature, the author's viewpoint embraces society, history and the cosmos. In the situation of his times, in this moral and social chaos, Paul sees the apocalyptic forces of evil breaking loose on the world. The whole world of the Gentiles (ch 1) and of the Jews (ch 2) is caught in a hopeless tide of chaos. In the proper sense of the term hell has been let loose on the world of men.

So when Paul quotes Ps 14:1-3 and 53:1-3

None is righteous, no, not one;....  
all have turned aside, together they have gone wrong;  
no one does good, not even one....

he is not passing a moral judgment on his contemporaries; neither is it a case of jaundiced misanthropy or mere rhetoric. It is the cry of despair of a man who sees the tragic impasse reached by a doomed world. The upheaval of society described in Rom 1:28-32 could be summarized in the words of Sartre: Hell is others. But Paul's thought is more radical than Sartre's because

he really means hell, the collective eschatological failure of a world led by its idols to a demented quest for self-destruction:

Wherever they go there is havoc and ruin;  
the way of peace they do not know (Rom 3:16-17).

## II. Under a Tyrant

The long and the short of the matter is that mankind is under the rule of sin (Rom 3:9). When we say this, however, we must realise that what we mean by sin nowadays hardly corresponds to what Paul had in mind when using that word. In present-day language sin is understood as an action of man, identifiable, numerable, against the law or the will of God. When speaking of this Paul uses rather the words transgression (*parabasis* 2:23; 4:15; 5:14), trespass (*paraptôma* 4:25; 5:15-20) and more rarely 'sins' in the plural (*hamartiai* 4:7f). In general, when Paul uses the word *hamartia* in the singular, he means Sin with a capital letter, almost personalized like an evil power, a malignant Ladyship (*hamartia* is feminine in Greek).

This tyrant is the leading character in the apocalyptic tragedy in which man finds himself involved. She makes her entrance in Rom 5:12. Up to that point, in the Epistle to the Romans the word sin appears only sporadically (four times only in four chapters two of which alone carry the personal sense under consideration). In 5:12 "Sin enters the world through one man...". The image is that of the villain of the drama appearing on the stage with this frightful difference that the stage is the world, the play is our life and we are all deeply involved; all men are under this ghastly influence ("all men" is repeated four times in

3. Rom 5:12 and particularly the clause "because all men have sinned" raises difficult problems. See J. A. FITZMYER, *The Letter to the Romans*, in *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, London, 1968, pp. 306-308 and a survey on more recent literature in L. SABOURIN, *Original Sin Reappraised*, in *BibThB* 3 (1973), pp. 51-81. Whatever may be the interpretation of 5:12, it is clear that Paul sees man as deeply and personally committed to the power of Sin: cf III/ 3 below.

vv 12-19 and "many" in the sense of "the multitude", four times more).

This is not a question of dramatizing or mythologizing an idea. Paul's point is not that Sin is an entity outside man. As a matter of fact, he insists that the sway of Sin entails that "all men have sinned" (5:12)<sup>3</sup>. But there is much more at stake than man's action or guilt. The apocalyptic background implies that the whole fabric of human condition comes under the dreadful power of the Tyrant. "All men, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of Sin" says Rom 3:9. This means much more than the fact that all men are sinners. What is implied is that the totality of human existence, under all its aspects, is alienated, taken over by an unescapable and deleterious influence, which comes indeed from man's disobedience but which has a reach far beyond the hearts of individuals.

Failure to perceive this has led to regrettable consequences.

1. At the theoretical level, the problem of "original sin" has been misconstrued as revolving basically round the paradoxical idea of the inheritance of an individual fault or guilt. Present-day theology sees better the social and cosmic significance of this doctrine.
2. At a more practical level, the Christian mystery has been reduced to moralism as if the whole issue was to get rid of sins and guilt and not primarily to receive the good news of man's liberation and to live in that freedom. As a result, theology and the Church have been unable to express the Gospel in terms of man's overwhelming frustrations, anxieties and alienations.

### III. Death, the Law and the Flesh

The tragedy of a humanity which has become "the purchased slave of Sin" is also expressed in Rom. by the various roles attributed to Sin's confederates: Death, the Law and the Flesh.

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4. R. BULTMANN, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol 1, London, 1952, pp 246-248.

### 1. Death (Rom 5: 12-21)

In Rom 5: 12, Lady Hamartia enters the stage accompanied by a gruesome escort, Death. The word *thanatos* (death) being masculine in Greek as *hamartia* is feminine, the image is of a couple of hideous partners.

In his Theology of the New Testament, Bultmann has analysed three aspects of death in St Paul<sup>4</sup>.

(a) In line with the traditional juristic notion of the Old Testament death may be presented by Paul as punishment for sin (cf Rom 1: 32; 6:23). This punishment is confirmed by a final verdict of God (2:6-11).

(b) In line with Greek thought, in one passage, death is presented as a natural consequence of the "earthly", "fleshy" "perishable" nature of man (1 Cor 15: 45-49).

(c) In most cases, Paul goes deeper and views death as a logical consequence of a perverted existence, that lives "after the flesh", i. e. "clutching at emptiness"<sup>5</sup>. This meaning of "death" appears from the way in which it is opposed to "life" in Rom 5: 17-18. In those verses, "life" is identified with "abundance of grace" and "righteousness". Here as in general in Hebrew thought, "life" is not only existence but fullness of life, life worth living, meaningful existence. Death is the opposite of this "quality of life". Commentators of Rom 5: 12-18 explain that, in this passage, Paul does not speak only of biological death but also of eternal death<sup>6</sup>. They are right to stress that Paul meant more than biological death. But the alternative need not be "eternal death" in the sense of other-worldly condemnation. Or rather the other-wordly doom is just the outcome of the living death, of the enslavement to "futility" (Rom 8: 20), i. e. to non-being. This living death is described by the book of Wisdom which constitutes the background of Rom 5: 12 (cf Wis 2: 24):

5. Ibid., p. 247.

6. Cf. S. LYONNET-L. SABOURIN, *Sin, Redemption and Sacrifice*, Rome, 1970, pp. 55-56.

(For the ungodly) vain is their hope and fruitless  
their labours and their works are useless...

Even if they live long they will be held of no  
account, and finally their old age will be without  
honour (Wis 3: 11, 18)<sup>7</sup>.

It is in this sense that Paul writes that "The striving of the flesh is death" (Rom 8: 6). This would not make sense if death were given only a biological interpretation: The "flesh" anxiously strives to survive with the desperate energy of the instinct of self-preservation. Paul's point is rather that "it is death to limit oneself to what is unspiritual" as the translation of the Jerusalem Bible puts it. The rendering "unspiritual" for "flesh" may not be quite apt. Apart from that, the rest conveys Paul's idea: a life cut off from the openness, creativity and freedom of the Spirit is no life: it is death. All the aspirations of such an enslaved existence open only on despair. The second part of Rom 8: 6 continues with the opposite statement: "The striving of the Spirit is life and peace". The addition of "peace" to "life" shows clearly that "life" means not only biological life or other-worldly life but the quality of life of those who live really. The same existential sense must be given to "death" in the first part of the verse. Jesus had already said in the same sense:

He who finds his life will lose it;

He who loses his life for my sake will find it (Mt 10;39).

d) A point which is not brought out in Bultmann's analysis is that "death" for Paul has also a cosmic aspect. Sin saps the dynamism of life not only in the individual and in society but in man's environment as well. We live in a deadly world. The meaning of such a statement need not be explained at length in the context of a civilisation that lives under the threat of an atomic holocaust, suffocated by all kinds of pollution, pushed to the verge of chaos by the insane conflicts of greedy economic and political forces, and dreading to find itself toppling into

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7. On the meaning of life and death in Wisdom, see C. LARCHER, *Etudes sur le livre de la Sagesse*, Paris, 1969, pp. 285-300.

nothingness through ecological unbalance. The man of today has recovered the sense of the fragility of the world which the ancient peoples experienced acutely. He understands better what the first book of the Bible means when it shows the delicate balance between light and darkness, abyss and earth, chaos and peace held only by the power of God's word of faithful love (Gen 1:8, 10). A recent book has described at length how the Old Testament perceived death as linked up to the environment of man and described it in terms of ruin, silence, darkness, desert, prison, pit, etc.<sup>8</sup>.

There is one passage of Paul's where this trend of thought is made particularly explicit:

The creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God (Rom 8:20-21).

The text is mysterious and raises several problems which need not be treated here. What comes out of it is that the deadly futility of a meaningless life extends to the relationship between man and his environment. The cosmos which is idolized devours its worshippers. Made an absolute, it loses its meaning; it comes under "the bondage of decay". As modern language would put it, everything is rotten. The stench of death covers the whole world of men.

## 2. The Law (Rom 7)

Another accomplice of Sin is the Law: "Through the commandment Sin became sinful beyond measure" (Rom 7:13). This is paradoxical. The Law is a principle of order, harmony and peace. Can it be on the side of Sin? The paradox would be particularly shocking for a Jew of old who considered the Law as a God-given grace, the sum total of God's favours for his people (Sir 24:23).

8. N. J. TROMP, *Primitive Conception of Death and the Nether World in the Old Testament*, Rome, 1969.

Certainly, says Paul, "the Law is holy; holy is the Commandment and just and good" (Rom 7:12). Yet the fact is that concretely, the Law has been "power of sin" (1 Cor 15:56). Practically it "came in to increase the trespass" (Gal 3:19).

If it had not been for the Law, I should not have known sin. I should not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, You shall not covet. But Sin, finding opportunity in the commandment, wrought in me all kinds of covetousness. Apart from the Law, Sin lies dead (Rom 7:7-8).

By proposing an ideal without giving the inner strength to reach it, the Law has just added to the frustrations and the futility of all. Without the Law, Lady Sin was just a sleeping monster. By the stupid officiousness of good intentions, the Commandments have stirred the monster to action and it is now on the rampage.

When the Commandment came, Sin revived and I died; the very Commandment which promised life proved to be death to me. For Sin, finding opportunity in the Commandment, deceived me and by it killed me (Rom 7:9-11).

Many studies have been devoted to determine who is the I who speaks here<sup>9</sup>. Is it Paul himself? and if so does he refer to his experiences as a Jew before his conversion or as a Christian after it? There is a fairly large agreement now that the 'I' is rather rhetorical, personifying "any man on earth facing the law, transgression and sin"<sup>10</sup>. This is clear enough once we realise that Paul is thinking of the Genesis story: V. 9 evokes the commandment to Adam in Gen 2:17; Sin "deceives" man as in Gen 3:13; "Sin personified takes the place of the serpent of Gen 3:1 and of the devil of wisdom 2:24"<sup>11</sup>.

9. See a bibliographical survey of those studies in W. G. KUEMMEL, *Man in the New Testament*, London, 1963, pp. 51-53.

10. *Traduction Oecuménique de la Bible, Nouveau Testament*, Paris, 1972, p. 467.

11. *The Jerusalem Bible*, London, 1966, p. 279.

There follow important consequences. If the man who struggles with the Law in Rom 7 is any son of Adam, any man, it follows that the dialectics of Sin and the Law described there does not refer to the Jewish law specifically but to any law. The law "which held us captive" (7:6) is not particularly the Mosaic law. Any form of law is a cause of alienation, an occasion for sin, situated within the pale of death. This is why when giving an example of law in 7:7, Paul quotes the most general and the least Mosaic item of the Decalogue: "Thou shalt not covet". Put in such general terms, it loses its reference to the 10th commandment (Ex 20:7) and becomes the quintessence of any command.

As S. Lyonnet has shown in an important paper on Liberty and Law<sup>12</sup>, Paul's conception of Christian freedom is radical like the prophetic tradition it continues (cf Jer 31:31-34). The Christian is free from the Law (Rom 7:1-6). For the law – any law – is a law of sin and death (Rom 8:2), the letter that kills (2 Cor 3:6). The Spirit only gives life. Commenting on this text, St Thomas Aquinas does not hesitate to say:

The letter denotes any writing that is external to man, even that of the moral precepts such as are contained in the Gospel. Wherefore the letter, even of the Gospel, would kill, unless there were the inward presence of the healing grace of faith.<sup>13</sup>

These are very radical terms. Applied to present-day conditions they constitute the indictment of any "establishment", of any structure that wants to ensure its survival by external constraint. A full theology of the "institution" can be built following the model used by Paul to assess the Law, the Judaic institution he knew. Institutions are not bad: they are "just and good". They can be "holy" in so far as they come from God (Rom 7:14). They play a pedagogic role (Gal 3:24). But, at the same time, in so far as they are "the letter", they are killing, they prove to be death to man (Rom 7:10); they are means of

12. S. LYONNET, St Paul: Liberty and Law, in *The Bridge, A Yearbook of Judeo-Christian Studies*, IV, 1962, pp. 229-251.

13. *Summa Theologiae I-II*, q. 106, a. 2, c.

enslavement (7:6). Following St Thomas, Bellarmine insists that this applies not only to the law of Moses but "even to the law of Christ, to the extent that it commands something; it is the law of works"<sup>14</sup>.

Paul does not advocate lawlessness: Christian freedom must be service of "righteousness for sanctification" (Rom 6:17-19). But Paul's critical analysis of the law contains an important message. It implies, that any "establishment", any structure and institution, contains in itself an inborn complicity with sin, the conscious or unconscious temptation of operating as a minister of death, of the "futility" and emptiness which affect the world. It is the tragedy of man that, on the one hand, he cannot live outside a social organisation but that on the other hand, this organisation cannot escape the magnetism of sin. It will bear in itself the temptation to function at the level of fear and might since it cannot by itself address and redress man's true free self.

### 3. The Flesh (Rom 7:15-25)

If the God-given Law has turned into an occasion of sin, it is on account of another accomplice of Lady *Hamartia*, the Flesh (*sarx*).

We know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under the power of Sin (Rom 7:14).

Paul's analysis of the tragedy of man does not stop with the structures. If things go wrong and if the best structures themselves defeat their good intentions, it is on account of something deeper which he calls "the flesh", a term rendered in modern translations as "lower" or "unspiritual nature" (NEB, JB), "human nature" (TEV), "sinful nature" "carnal attitude" or "nature" (Phillips). Luther may have found the best rendering when he spoke *De Servo Arbitrio*, of the "enslaved 'free' will". We could speak also of the "alienated self" or of the "divided self".

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14. BELLARMINE, *De justificatione impii* I<sup>1</sup> 19, quoted by LYONNET, *Liberty and Law, art cit.*, p. 245.

This is the ultimate alienation of which the others are only the symptoms. It is described in Rom 7:14-24. Here also, as in vv 9-11, the K-language is used. "I do not do what I want, I do the very thing I hate." Here again, the I who speaks is not necessarily Paul himself referring to his expérience before or after his conversion. There is more here than psychological analysis. What is described is not Paul's but man's tragedy. For all his aspirations towards a free and authentic existence, man cannot but strengthen the hold of sin on himself by every action of his. There is a kind of possession by Sin, an "indwelling" of Sin in man (v 20): "Sin alienates man in the sense that it launches him into a destiny that goes against his deepest aspirations and God-given vocation."<sup>15</sup>

The most tragic thing of all is that man is often unaware of this situation. Like Karl Barth's horseman man discovers the situation he was in only when he has reached the other side. The light of faith only makes him realize how distorted his righteousness was, how futile his aspirations, how dead his life. Only through the discovery of the freedom of the Spirit does a man become aware of the chains that bound him. The worst alienation is precisely this lack of awareness and the "boasting" (Rom 3:27; 4:2) that goes along with it, i.e. the illusion that one is free, which is just pitiful ignorance of true freedom.

### Conclusion

By showing its deep complicity with Sin in man, this analysis of the concept of the flesh in Rom 7:14-21 demythologizes the image of Sin as a personified power entering the stage like some mythological monster. At the same time, the dramatic image of Sin as it appears in Rom 1-7 may help modern man to go beyond the individualistic, moralizing and largely irrelevant concept which he has inherited.

In fact, it is the whole tragedy of man with its various aspects that Paul describes in his analysis. The relevance of this analysis has been brought out by recent studies. Paul has been confronted with Freud<sup>16</sup> and with Marx<sup>17</sup>. There would be a

15. TOB, *op. cit.*, p. 468.

16. P. GRELOT, *Péché Originel et Rédemption à partir de l'Epître aux Romains*, Paris, 1973.

17. F. REFOULE, *Marx et S. Paul*, Paris, 1974.

place also for a comparison between Paul and the modern prophets and philosophers of the ecological crisis. Indeed we find in Paul an acute awareness of the main aspects of man's misery: the social alienation of the law', the religious alienation of "idols" that devour their devotees, the cosmic alienation of "death" and, underlying all these, the basic interior alienation of a false self-centred freedom.

When coming to the end of his long analysis at the end of Rom 7, Paul concludes in the accents of the ancient tragedies: Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? (Rom 7:24)

The man of today, traumatised by the collapse of the affluent society and its various utopias may be better attuned than his predecessors to these tragic accents. Ours, once more, is an apocalyptic age which knows again the cosmic anguish, has seen through false social orders and has gauged the misery of the human heart.

But because the man of today has passed through this experience, he may also be closer to the revelation of the grace of God in Christ. The message of Paul is essentially that of the saving power of the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. But the joy of this salvation cannot be experienced without an awareness of one's hopeless situation.

"Is it not a fact that many people who frequent our churches and recite the Our Father saying: 'Forgive our sins,' have no desire whatsoever to obtain remission of sins for the simple reason that they do not want to recognize them."

In this statement of Thielicke, "sins" should be corrected as "Sin" to reach the depth of St Paul's thought. With this correction, it summarizes Paul's views accurately. Only he who has recognized the miserable condition he is in (Rom 7:25) may know "the overwhelming victory which is ours through him who loved us" (Rom 8:37).

L. Legrand

# The Tragedy of Freedom: Man in the Thought of Zarathushtra

Zoroastrianism has been described as "the only prophetic religion ever produced by the Aryan race",<sup>1</sup> which is quite true, for the faith proclaimed by Zarathushtra,<sup>2</sup> unlike Hinduism,<sup>3</sup> has its origin, in the final analysis, in the inner experience of an historical individual who believed in a personal God and was convinced that he was called by the same God to be his spokesman. Zarathushtra is *the prophet*<sup>4</sup> of the Aryans, and the

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1. R. C. Zaehner, *The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism* (London, 1961) p. 170. We might very well say, that Zoroastrianism is the only prophetic religion ever produced by the Indo-European race. By the designation prophet we mean not a person who predicts the future but one who speaks in the name of another, i. e., God.

2. This is the accurate form of the prophet's name; the appellation we are all acquainted with, Zoroaster, represents the Greek transformation of the Iranian name.

3. The Hindu religion has no founder at all, and neither the Buddha nor Mahāvīra ever claimed to be spokesman of a personal God who guides and governs the course of history.

4. Nietzsche's presentation of the prophet in his *Also Sprach Zarathustra* ("Thus Spoke Z.") is a veritable caricature and falsification. The great archaeologist E. E. Herzfeld, in his massive *Zoroaster and his World* (2 vols., Princeton, 1947) depicts him as a clever and cunning politician, and the Swedish scholar in his highly personal *Die Religionen des Alten Iran* (Mitteilungen der Vorderasiatisch-Aegyptischen Gesellschaft 43, repr., Osnabrück, 1966) represents him as a visionary and ecstatic. For scathing criticism of these views see W. B. Henning, *Zoroaster, Politician or Witch-Doctor?* (Oxford, 1951). According to the generally accepted view (which forms the basis of the present study) Zarathushtra was a world-affirming, militant prophet who was convinced that God was on his side.

religion he founded differs in several respects from the one that evolved in India. A close acquaintance with Zoroastrianism<sup>5</sup>, the system that represents the full flowering of the religious genius of the Aryans of Iran, is quite essential, for without it our knowledge of India's spiritual development is bound to remain one-sided and partial. In this paper there will be first a short account of the prophet's life along with a brief description of the Avesta. Next his conception of man will be considered. The essay will close with a few observations on the significance of Zarathushtra's message for the Christian believer.

## I

Zarathushtra was a priest belonging to the Spitama clan, who, according to the tradition of the Parsees,<sup>6</sup> was born 258

5. There is a vast corpus of scientific and popular studies on Zoroastrianism; to the works referred to in n. 4 must be added the following which too deal with the prophet's life and religion. C. Bartholomae, *Zarathustras Leben und Lehre* (Heidelberg, 1924). J. Duchesne-Guillemain, *Zoroastre. Etude critique avec une traduction commentée des Gâthâs* (Paris, 1948). W. Hinz, *Zarathustra* (Stuttgart, 1961). O. Klíma, *Zarathustra* (Prague, 1964). B. Schlerath (ed.), *Zarathustra* (Wege der Forschung Bd. 169, Darmstadt, 1970); this work is a collection of nineteen studies eleven specialists. On Zoroastrian religion as such, cf. Duchesne-Guillemain, *La religione de l'Iran ancien* ("Manā." Introduction à l'histoire des religions 1, Paris, 1962). H. Lommel, *Die Religion Zarathustras nach dem Avesta dargestellt* (Tübingen, 1930). J. H. Moulton, *Early Zoroastrianism* (London, 1913). Nyberg, *op. cit.*, passim. R. Pettazzoni. *La religione de Zarathustra* (Rome, 1922). G. Widengren, *Die Religionen Irans* (Die Religionen der Menschheit 14, Stuttgart, 1965). Zaehner, *op. cit.* passim.

6. There are specialists who reject outright the Parsee tradition, but since it cannot be shown to be utterly false, it is provisionally adopted here. While for some the question of date is of no moment (thus Nyberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 26ff.), others opt for a date around 900 B. C. The Czechoslovakian scholar Otakar Klíma, in his "The Date of Zoroaster," *Archiv Orientální* (1959) pp. 559ff., with an appeal to Manichaean sources, opts for a date in the eighth century. For a short discussion, cf. J. Finegan, *The Archaeology of World Religions I* (Princeton, 1965). pp. 77-83.

years before Alexander's sack of Persepolis and the death of Darius III, the last of the Achaemenid emperors. These events took place in 330 B. C., and by adding to this figure 258 we obtain the date 588 B. C., but this can refer only to the prophet's success in converting king Vishtāspa to the new religion. He was at this time forty years old, and died thirty-seven years later. On the basis of these data we may regard 628-551 B. C., as covering Zarathushtra's life-span. We know that the prophet, because of the opposition of his compatriots to the new faith,<sup>7</sup> left home and betook himself to Khorasmia, the principality in eastern Iran<sup>8</sup> whose ruler was Vishtāspa. Zarathushtra's place of birth cannot be determined, but from the fact that the Avesta mentions only one place in western Iran, namely, Raghā, which it even calls Zarathushtrian (*Yasna* 19: 18), one may presume that he was a native of this city.<sup>9</sup> Finally according to tradition, he lost his life in an encounter with Turkman invaders.<sup>10</sup>

The Avesta<sup>11</sup> is the principal source<sup>12</sup> for the study of Zarathushtra's religion. It is said to have been a massive work

7. They are called *karapans*, "mumblers," i. e., priests who recite sacred formulae in a subdued voice, and *kavis* (which is the same as Skt. *kavi*-); in Iranian the latter term designates tribal chieftains or rulers, and may very well point to the fact that kings were exercising priestly functions as well.

8. It comprised the district of Khorasan in modern Iran, Western Afghanistan and the Turkoman Republic of the Soviet Union.

9. On this point too there is no agreement among scholars (cf. Duchesne-Guillemin, *Kratylos* 15 [1972] p. 221); a place of the same name in Media is mentioned by the book of Tobit.

10. According to Zoroastrian tradition the prophet was murdered by a Turkoman named Bradroresh or Bradar-Vakhsh.

11. This is the anglicized form of the Pahlavi title *Apstāk* or *Abstāg*, "text;" the meaning "injunction" (of Zarathustra) has also been suggested. The first scholars who investigated the Zoroastrian scriptures called the collection *Zend-Avesta*, which, however, is a misnomer since it means "commentary (and) text." For a good introduction, cf. C. de Harlez, *Introduction to the Avesta* (Bombay, 1921). A collection of studies by specialists, edited by I. Gershevitch under the title *Die Erforschung des Avesta*

comprising twenty-one books. The actual text we now have before us is only one-fourth of the original. The Zoroastrian scriptures can be divided into three major sections. There is, to begin with, the collection called Yasna, a name which is the Iranian equivalent of Sanskrit *yajña-*, and may well be rendered "worship, liturgy". Analogous to it there is a shorter liturgy known as Visprat (also spelt Vispered).<sup>13</sup> The Yasna is itself complex, i. e., made up of three distinct layers dating from different times and doubtless presupposing different historical circumstances. The earliest layer consists of the Gāthās (Yasna 28-34, 43-53), "hymns, songs," composed by the prophet himself and as such preserves his original message in his *ipsissima verba*.<sup>14</sup> Inserted between Yasna 34 and 43 is another collection written in the Gāthic dialect that goes by the name *haptanhāiti gāthā* (Yasna 35-42), "the Gāthā of seven Chapters". It is remarkable for its mitigation of the militancy of Zarathushtra's original message<sup>15</sup>. The rest of the Yasna is composed in a later form of language and, of course, marks a further departure from the primitive teaching.

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(Wege der Forschung Bd. 164) is expected to appear soon. English translation by J. Darmsteter-L. H. Mills, *The Zend-Avesta* (The Sacred Books of the East, vols. 4, 23, 31, repr., Delhi. 1969).

12. There are much later sources which cannot be considered here.

13. This title is a modification of the expression *vīspē ratavō*, "all the ratus" (= patrons).

14. Original text in transliteration with translation, paraphrase and philological commentary in H. Humbach, *Die Gathas des Zarathustra I-II* (Indogermanische Bibliothek; Erste Reihe: Lehr- und Handbücher, Heidelberg, 1959). M. W. Smith, *Studies in the Syntax of the Gathas of Zarathustra together with Text, Translation and Notes* (Language Dissertations 4, Philadelphia, 1929, repr. 1966). German translation in H. Lommel, *Die Gathas des Zarathustra* (Sammlung Klosterberg, N. F., Basel, 1971). In this paper all the texts are cited from Duchesne-Guillemin, *The Hymns of Zarathustra* (Beacon Paperbacks, Boston, 1963). Needless to say, the renderings are not always sure.

15. Political changes and the consequent loss of royal patronage were responsible for the abandonment of dogmatism and intolerance.

The second part of the Avesta, known as *Yasht*<sup>16</sup>, consists of a collection of hymns addressed to the various deities of the old Aryan pantheon, such as Mithra (=Skt. Mitra), Vayu (=Skt. Vāyu) and Vərəthrəghna (==Skt. Vṛtraghna), deities to whom Zarathushtra was quite hostile but who nonetheless remained popular among the masses of his followers. This section is clearly polytheistic, and even degenerate, inasmuch as it goes to the extent of humiliating Ahura Mazdāh (cf. II) by making him address prayers to some of the members of the pantheon! To the *Yasht* must be added another collection of auxiliary texts generally called *Khurda Avesta*, "Little Avesta." The third part of the Zoroastrian Bible is the *Vidēvdāt* (formerly read as 'Vendidad' as the result of a misunderstanding of the script), "Law against the Daēvas" (demons). This last product of the Avestan age "shows no spiritual life at all, only a futile legalistic dualism which, if it had ever been put into practice, would have tried the patience of even the most credulous."<sup>17</sup> In what follows the discussions are confined exclusively to the *Gāthās* and the data furnished by them.

A few words must be added here about the socio-economic background of Zarathushtra's message. The milieu in which he lived and worked was pastoral, and the people to whom he was preaching were engaged in cattle breeding and husbandry, but they were constantly being threatened by the waves of fierce nomads coming from the vast and extensive steppes of central Asia. The nomadic hordes who brought along with them violence and destruction typified for the prophet evil in all its starkness and bleakness, so that he was wont to call them "followers of the *Druj*" (==Lie).<sup>18</sup> In opposition to them there

16. This term is a passive participle of *yas-* (=Skt. *yaj-*).

17. Zaehner, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

18. The technical term *druj-* is the Middle Persian form of Avestan *drug-* "lie," which is etymologically related to Skt. *druha-*, "hurt, harm," Old High German *triogan*, Modern German *trügen*, "to cheat, deceive," etc. In Zarathushtra's thought it is the antonym of *asha-* (cf. n. 19) and its adherents are called *drəgvant-*, *dravant-* or *drujant-* (all participial formations in -vant-).

were the "followers of Asha" (=Truth),<sup>19</sup> who, in the concrete were the ones who accepted his preaching. This socio-political situation, so remarkable for its clear-cut distinction between good and evil, truth and the lie, came to be transferred to the sphere of religion and ethics, the outcome of which was the element of dualism that is so basic to Zarathushtra's message. History is thenceforth the stage where the conflict between good and evil goes on, and man, as an historical being, has to pay an active rôle in the destruction of evil and the final triumph of good.

## II

Yasna 29 is an autobiographical account of Zarathushtra's call to be God's prophet: he alone knows the divine *sasna-* (=Skt. *śāsana-*), and to enable him to discharge his prophetic office he is given "sweetness of speech," i. e., persuasive eloquence.<sup>20</sup> Zarathushtra's God is known by the name Ahura Mazdāh,<sup>21</sup> "the

19. Cognate with Skt. *rta-*, Avestan *asha-* is a modification of the earlier form *arta-* (for the change of *-rt-* to *-sh-*, cf. *martya-* *mashya-*) which survives in the combinations *ae-arəta-* (= Skt. *anrta-*), *apai-ərəta-*, etc., and corresponds to Latin *art-us*, *art-is* (whence English *art*. etc.) and so forth. The adherent of *asha-* is known as *ashvant-* (participle). The expression (as also Skt. *rta-*) must be rendered "truth," and in the antithesis between truth and falsehood which is so basic to the teaching of Zarathushtra we have a tradition that goes back to the common Indo-Iranian heritage, and a survival of it had in the opposition between *rta-* and *anrta-* so well attested in the first Veda. In India, however, this antithesis never underwent any evolution.

20. In the original *hudəmə vaxədrahyā* = Skt. *svādman vaktrasya*.

21. Iranian *ahura-* is the same as Skt. *asura-* (with the change of *s* to *h*); the etymology of the term is not clear (cf. E. Benveniste in E. Benveniste-L. Renou, *Vṛtra et Vṛthraghna. Etude de mythologie indoiranienne* (Cahiers de la Société Asiatique 3, Paris, 1934) pp. 42-49), but in any case there were, in Indo-Iranian antiquity, divine beings called by this name, and if they have become in India demons, it is the result of a secondary development. Mazdāh is a cognate of Skt- *medhā-* "wisdom, insight," etc.

Wise Lord," who is unique in every respect. He is the creator and the one who guides the course of history. The origin of the prophet's "monotheism" is a moot problem,<sup>22</sup> which, in this short essay, cannot be discussed, and for our purpose it is sufficient to note that he reduced the *daēvas* (Skt. *devas*) of the traditional religion to the rank of demons, and discarded all the *ahuras* (=Skt. *asuras*) with the exception of one, to whom he also gave the qualification *Mazdāh*. The likelihood is that this *Ahura par excellence* was none other than *Varuṇa*, the most ethical of the gods of the Vedic pantheon, whose name in Iranian would have the form *Vouruna*.<sup>23</sup> The R̄gveda uses the dvandva compound *Mitrāvaruṇa*,<sup>24</sup> corresponding to which there is in the Avesta the expression *Mithra-Ahura*, or, in the reverse order *Ahura-Mithra*. There was, then, in existence among the Iranians a godhead – an *Ahura* – who resembled *Varuṇa* most closely and whom Zarathushtra accepted as his personal God. It is interesting to note that in the Gāthās the double name *Ahura Mazdāh* does not occur in fixed form, and the two elements do not appear in the sequence attested to by the later Avesta and the Achaemenid inscriptions but are used as distinct epithets. At any rate Zarathushtra's originality as a prophet and religious reformer lies precisely in his proclamation of a strictly ethical monotheism.

The Iranian prophet's anthropology hinges on the teaching regarding the two spirits<sup>25</sup> and the freedom of will. Here is what he has to say about the twin spirits;

22. He was of course not a monotheist in the Judaeo-Christian and Islamic sense, and neither would he have been able to give a theoretical and abstract exposition of his views.

23. E. P. Hamp, "Varuṇa and the Suffix -una," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 4 (1960) p. 64.

24. That this combination is prevedic is clear from its occurrence in the treaty between Shuppiluliumash the Hittite emperor (1375–35 B. C.) and Matiwaza the Aryan ruler of the Mitanni kingdom. Discussions with reference to vedic tradition in P. Thieme, "The Aryan Gods of the Mitanni Treaties." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 80 (1960) pp. 301–17.

25. The expression used by the prophet is *mainyu paouruyē* (cf. Skt. *manyu-*, and *pūrva-*); the two *mainyus* are called *yəmā* (cf. Skt. *yama-*), "twins". Etymologically, *mainyu* is the agent

Now at the beginning the twin spirits have declared  
their nature,  
The better and the evil,  
In thought and word and deed. And between the  
two  
The wise one chooses well, not so the foolish.  
And when these two spirits came together,  
In the beginning they established life and non-life,  
And that at the last the worst existence be for the  
wicked,  
But for the righteous one the Best Mind.  
Of these two spirits, the evil one chose to do the  
worst things;  
But the Most Holy Spirit...  
Joined himself unto Righteousness:  
And thus did all those who delight to please the  
Wise Lord by honest deeds (Yasna 30: 3-5).

How are we to understand this myth?<sup>26</sup> Well, it represents a translation into theological terms of the socio-economic situation described at the end of part I. We do not know whether the myth is Zarathushtra's own creation or whether he was just formulating afresh something he had inherited from tradition, but be that as it may, the duality of good and evil arises from a primordial choice made in the celestial realms by the two spirits who were both free agents. The relationship between the Wise Lord, the supreme God who is the creator, and the twin spirits, strictly speaking, does not concern us here, though it is rather odd to find Zarathushtra affirming that Ahura had himself to make the choice between Truth and the Lie. As a

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who exercises the activity denoted by the Indo-Iranian root *man-* (Indo-European *men-*; cf. Greek *men-os* = Skt. *manas-*, Latin *mentis*, etc.), and the expression "spirit" adopted in the text is an interpretation rather than a translation.

26. No doubt there is question here of a fall consisting in the wrong choice, and according to later tradition which has elaborated this myth, the actors in this primordial drama were the first man and the first woman; the Iranian Adam and Eve sinned by acknowledging the demon Ahriman as lord and master.

matter of fact, he is represented as saying: "Your holy and good Devotion do we choose for ourselves" (Yasna 32; 2). Perhaps, while putting these words into the mouth of God, Zarathushtra only means that he (God) is on the side of Truth, and not on that of the Lie.

Men are divided into two groups according as they choose to adhere to the Truth or opt for the Lie (and follow it, and since the latter category of persons represent evil in all its grotesqueness and ugliness, an incessant and never-relenting war must be waged against them until they are completely wiped out from the face of this earth. Those who follow the Truth have to be their sworn enemies and mete out evil to them.

"Whether a man be master of little or of much,  
Let him be good to the righteous, evil to the wicked"

(Yasna 47:4);

To act otherwise would be to join the camp of the wicked:

"But he who... does not side with him,  
He shall return to the creatures of evil" (Yasna 46:6).<sup>27</sup>

As for himself, Zarathushtra claims to be an enemy of the followers of the Lie and a supporter of those who follow the Truth (Yasna 43:8). It would be a mistake to think that the wicked are so confirmed in evil that there is no possibility of conversion for them; on the contrary, being free agents (cf. below), they can make their own choice and turn to the Truth, and the good can also bring about their conversion:

"He who by word or thought or hands  
Works evil to the wicked one,  
Or he who converts his clansman to the good,  
He pleases the Lord and fulfils his will" (Yasna 33:2).

In other words, the wicked must be won over to the true faith.

The fact of choice means that man is free, and this brings us to the second distinctive element in the Iranian prophet's anthropology. There is not the least exaggeration in saying that Zarathushtra was the foremost protagonist of freedom of will in

27. Compare the word of Jesus: "He who is not with me is against me" (Mt. 12:30).

the pre-Christian world and that the religion he founded is essentially a religion of the free will. God created man as a free being:

“Since thou, O Wise One, in the beginning didst create  
for us by thy mind  
Beings and consciences and wills,  
Since thou didst give a body to the soul of life,  
Since thou didst create deeds and words, that men may  
decide freely” (Yasna 31:11).<sup>28</sup>

The last words of this stanza may thus be paraphrased: ‘that men may make their choice in freedom of will’. Exercise of freedom by choosing the Truth is, then, the programme of life the creator has prescribed for mankind, but since the translation of it into practice is fraught with great difficulty and demands heroic effort there arises the tragedy of freedom: to be free means to carry on a bitter and painful struggle.

With his emphasis on man’s responsibility for his actions, Zarathushtra makes us cognizant of another aspect of the tragedy of freedom: even though man will be judged by God, it is in fact the individual who automatically condemns or saves himself by his evil or good actions. Hear the prophet’s words:

“If you, O men, understand the commandments which  
the Wise One has given,  
Well-being and suffering – long torment for the wicked  
and salvation for the righteous –  
All shall hereafter be for the best” (Yasna 30:11).

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28. “May decide freely:” in the original *yathrā varənəng vasa dāyetē*; the clause deserves some clarification. The last word is the verb meaning “makes one’s own” (Humbach, *op. cit.*, II, p. 28), and the first word corresponds to Skt. *yatra*, “where, whither” and as conjunction denoting finality “in order that;” *varənā-* (from *var-*; cf. Skt. *vṛṇīte*, “he chooses”) is an action noun, “choosing, choice,” and *vasa-* (from *vas-*; cf. Skt. *vaśmi*, “I desire”) will literally mean “according to one’s will, pleasure, at will, freely.”

Freedom is a two-edged sword, indeed, an awful gift of the creator to man, who, unfortunately stands in danger of making the wrong choice and bringing about his own ruin.

There is too the problem arising from the fact that knowledge of the Truth is something very difficult, so much so that Zasathushtra, notwithstanding his status as Ahura Mazdāh's spokesman, is forced to ask:

The prophet has himself been in the dark when he had to make a decision, nonetheless he claims that he can act as guide and arbiter of men:

"Because the better way to choose of the two is not  
therefore in sight,  
To you all I come as judge of the two sides,  
Such as the Wise Lord knoweth me,  
That we may live according to Righteousness"  
(Yasna 31:2).

Now that there is somebody to point out the Truth, all men without exception are obliged to make a decision, a radical choice indeed, on which will depend their eternal fate:

"Hear with your ears that which is the sovereign good;  
With a clear mind look upon the two sides  
Between which each man must choose for himself,  
Watchful beforehand that the great test may be  
accomplished in our favour" (Yasna 30:2).

As we read the prophet's words, we are left with the impression that an Isaiah or Jeremiah is speaking!

Zoroastrian ethics can best be defined as an ethics of freedom which takes concrete shape and form in *humata*- (= Skt.

29. This request is repeated in Yasna 44 in all the stanzas except the last (nineteen times).

*sumata-*), *hūkhta-* (= Skt. *sūkta-*) and *huvarshta-* (=Skt. *sukṛta-*)<sup>30</sup>, "good thought, good word and good deed," i.e., piety in thoughts, words and deeds. A discussion of the nature of this unique ethical system cannot be attempted here, but it may be pointed out that later tradition as embodied in the Pahlavi books came to the conclusion that there are three celestial spheres corresponding to the three foundations of virtuous life.<sup>31</sup>

What is going to be the outcome of man's choice in this life? Is there eternal reward and an eternal punishment? The precise nature of Zarathushtra's idea of man's life after death is a moot question, for the Gāthās are themselves not clear on this point<sup>32</sup>. It would appear that the great prophet was of the view that the punishment of the wicked is eternal; such at least is the impression we get from the following statement:

"He who gives salvation or perdition<sup>33</sup>  
To those who are living or have been or shall be:  
The soul of the righteous rewarded with Immortality,  
Everlasting torments for the wicked..." (Yasna 45:7).<sup>34</sup>

As for heaven, it seems to be, at least according to one strand of thought, nothing but a transformation of this existence;<sup>35</sup> Compare,

30. Compare the Christian formula "thought, word and deed."

31. Cf. P. Gignou, "L'enfer et le paradis D'après les sources pehlevies," *Journal Asiatique* 256 (1968) pp. 219-45.

32. Discussions in F. König (Cardinal-Archbishop of Vienna, specialist in Iranistics), *Zarathustras Jenseitsvorstellungen und das Alte Testament* (Vienna, 1964).

33. The prophet uses here the expression *savā* (dual), "both benefits, advantages, front and hind part," and hence also "(eternal) benefit and (eternal) harm, salvation and damnation."

34. "Everlasting": *utayūtā*; "Die Etymologie... ist dunkel" (Nyberg, *op. cit.*, p. 141).

35. The word corresponding to transformation etc. is the adjective *ferasha*, occurring in the Gathas in conjunction with *ahūm*, *kar-* or *dā-*. and it is cognate with Skt. *prānk-*, *prāk*; the basic meaning is "suitable, fit, ready," and hence also "renovated".

“...Give me this sign: the entire remaking of this existence,  
That a greater joy may be mine in your worship and praise.  
...Through your Dominion, O Lord,

Do thou make existence truly renewed...” (Yasna 34:6.15).

It might even seem that this making existence better is an imminent thing, a transformation that will take place in Zarathushtra's own life time: “And may we be those that renew this existence” (Yasna 30:9). He expected a sudden change in the course of history which would usher in the consummation, and this event of the end-time he termed the last turning-point of existence:<sup>36</sup>

“And who...appoints the best of the good to him who  
fulfils his will,  
But the worst of the bad to him who shall not obey him,  
At the last turning-point of existence” (Yasna 51:6)?

The commencement of the second existence will, then, coincide with Ahura Mazdāh's apportioning of eternal reward to the just and everlasting misery and suffering to the wicked, and as far as the former are concerned, the consummation will mean the glorious termination of the life of warfare which is so inseparably bound up with the exercise of freedom.

Some readers may have noticed that in the course of this discussion no reference has been made to sin which according to the Judaeo-Christian tradition, is basically an abuse of freedom, the wrong choice. The reason is Zarathushtra's own silence on the matter, which becomes quite baffling particularly since he is fully convinced of God's holiness and even visualizes him as the Holy One.<sup>37</sup> Isaiah of Jerusalem, for example, reacted to his vision of Yahweh by making an avowal of his own sinfulness and that of the people of Israel, but such a reaction remains altogether alien to Zarathushtra's religious life nor would he

36. In the original *apəmə anhəush urvaēsē*, “am letzten Wendepunkt seines Lebenslaufs” (Humbach, *op. cit.*, I, p. 151).

37. In Zarathushtra's theology holiness is abundance, productivity, etc., and the term denoting it, i.e., *spənta-* (corresponding to Slavic *svat-* and Lithuanian *sveñtas*, “holy,” used of saints, etc.) is an adjective formation from *span-*, “to be active” (discussions in Nyberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 93 f.).

ever endorse the following confession made by an anonymous Sumerian poet: "Never was a sinless child born to its mother"<sup>38</sup>

### III

According to Zarathushtra man is an historical being who is free and who has to attain life's supreme goal by the sheer exercise of his God-given freedom. Existence in time and space, with its necessary sequel, namely vigorous activity involving the choice of the Truth and the rejection of the Lie, is never for him a bondage; on the contrary, it is God's gracious gift to man, and when man exercises his freedom through responsible actions, he does not fall a victim to any blind, ineluctable law or process. To be man is to be in the world and to make the right choice. This personalistic conception of man and emphasis on freedom, as we all know, are characteristic of modern Christian thought.

Flight from the world, contempt for the body, renunciation, etc. are taboo to the Iranian prophet, for the good things of this life are the creator's gracious gift to man who can not only make use of them but also enjoy them. Terrestrial realities in their entirety are the outpourings of God's holiness, or, using scholastic terminology, *actiones ad extra* of God's unbounded holiness. In the *Gāthās* there is at times such an interpenetration of the material and spiritual realms that it is impossible to make out whether a given passage is dealing with this life or the next<sup>39</sup>. And Christians now realize that it is impossible to say "Hallowed be thy name" if God does not give us our daily bread!<sup>40</sup>.

The attitude of passivity *vis-à-vis* the challenges of life is altogether alien to Zarathushtra's thought. The greatest evil that man has to face is the Lie, and since it has to be eliminated by all means, man can never remain passive, and this conviction makes the prophet militant, intolerant of the religion of the worshippers of the daēvas; he is enemy number one of the

38. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts. Supplement* (Princeton, 1969) p. 590.

39. Zaehner, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

40. This point will be brought out in the special number of Jeevadhara 1976 dealing with man's economic liberation.

followers of the Lie. Dogmatic intolerance is certainly not a distinctive feature of modern believers, but men of all persuasions are nonetheless convinced more than ever of the need to fight evil in all its forms and bear active and positive witness to the truth. Zarathushtra's ardour for the Truth has its significance even now.

Lastly the Iranian prophet's conviction that life is a bitter struggle, an incessant warfare, does not make him a pessimist;<sup>41</sup> on the contrary, his affirmation of man's freedom as well as of his power to use freedom to make the right choice, a power that is an integral part of God's gracious gift to mankind, gives him firm hope for the future: Truth (God) will certainly triumph in the end, and the tragedy of freedom will then have a most glorious finale. This unshaken faith it was that sustained the great prophet even when he had to face bitter opposition and then go into exile; it was the fountain-head from which issued forth that sense of optimism which is prominent everywhere in the *Gāthās*. Christianity too is a religion the source of whose optimism is the revelation of God's salvific activity in Christ.

The existence of the Parsee community in India is perhaps the most cogent historical argument in favour of the value, worth, inner vitality and vigour of Zarathushtra's anthropology. Hunted down by ruthless fanatics who had at their disposal a state with all its powerful machinery, the founding fathers of the Parsee community came to India, and the Hindu rulers not only welcomed them but also allowed them to practise their faith in all freedom. That which was responsible for the survival of this tiny group of exiles and enabled their descendants to emerge in the last century, alongside the sons of the soil as fashioners of modern India, was their prophet's message. In the words of R. C. Zaehner (who doubtless is thinking of some of the current fads in the West): Zarathushtra's preaching "may serve as some slight corrective to the modern tendency to turn to a bastard form of Buddhism or Vedantism, imperfectly understood, in order to shirk the responsibilities that living in this world imposes on us"<sup>42</sup>.

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41. Some of the dualistic systems of thought landed in an extreme form of pessimism, contempt of the body and matter, etc. Similar tendencies became rampant in some circles of thinkers in India.

42. *Op. cit.*, p. 17.

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